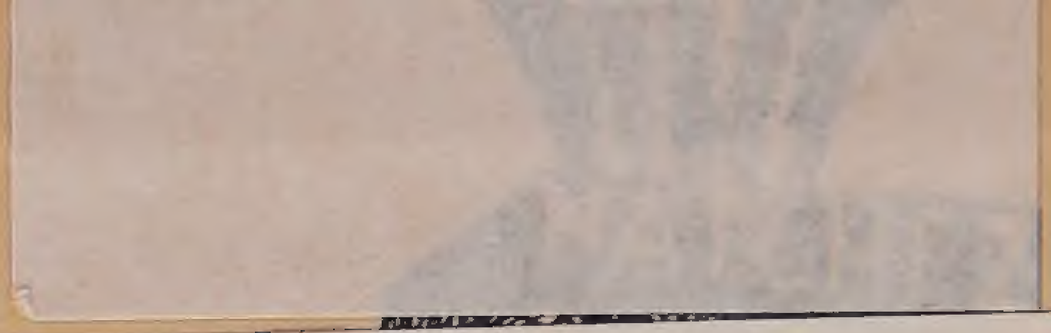
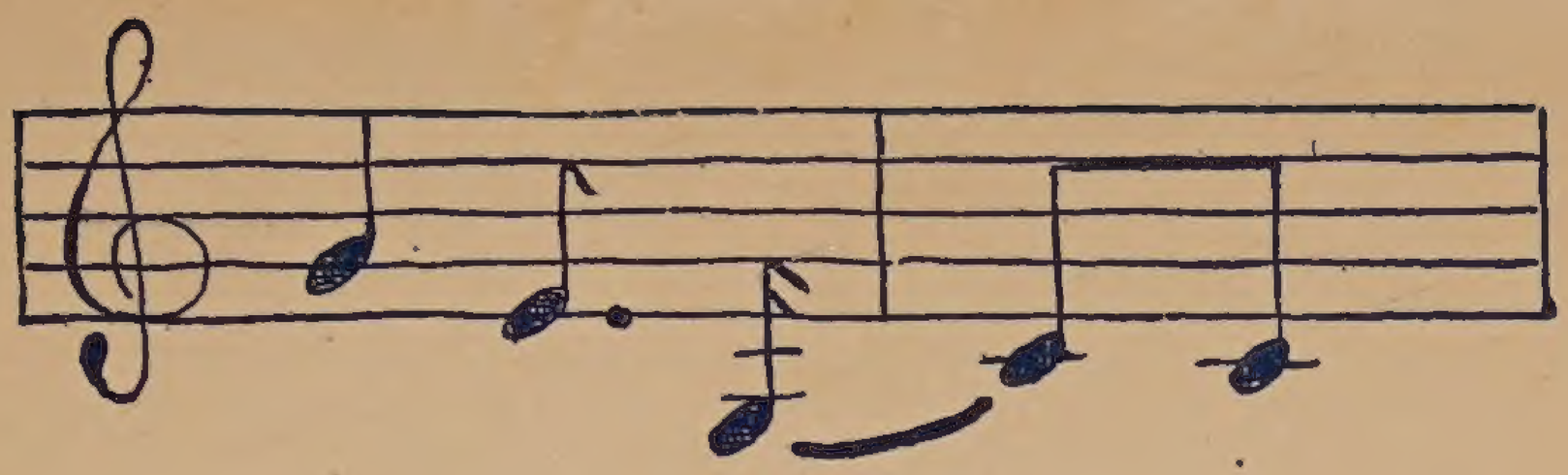


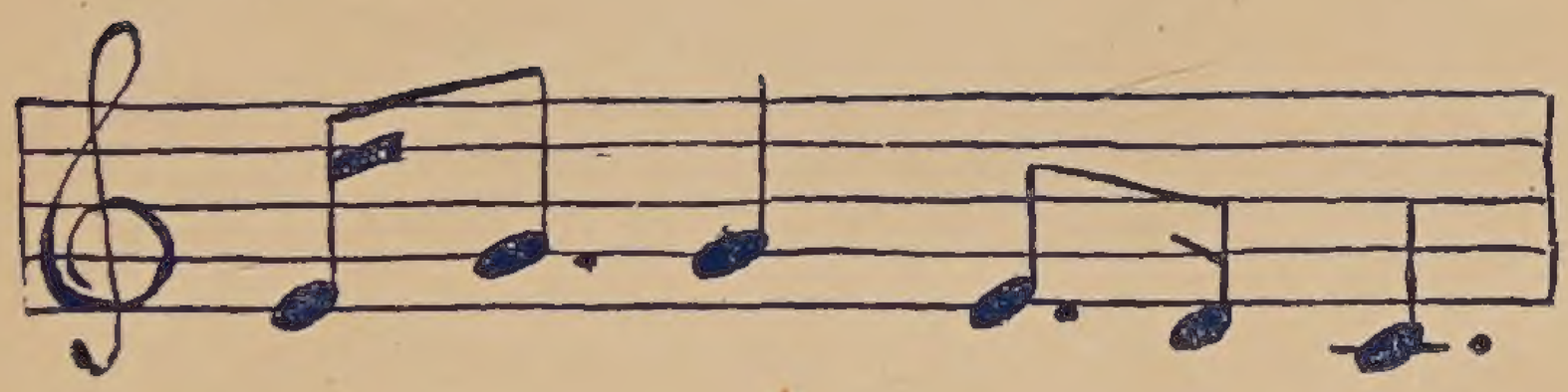
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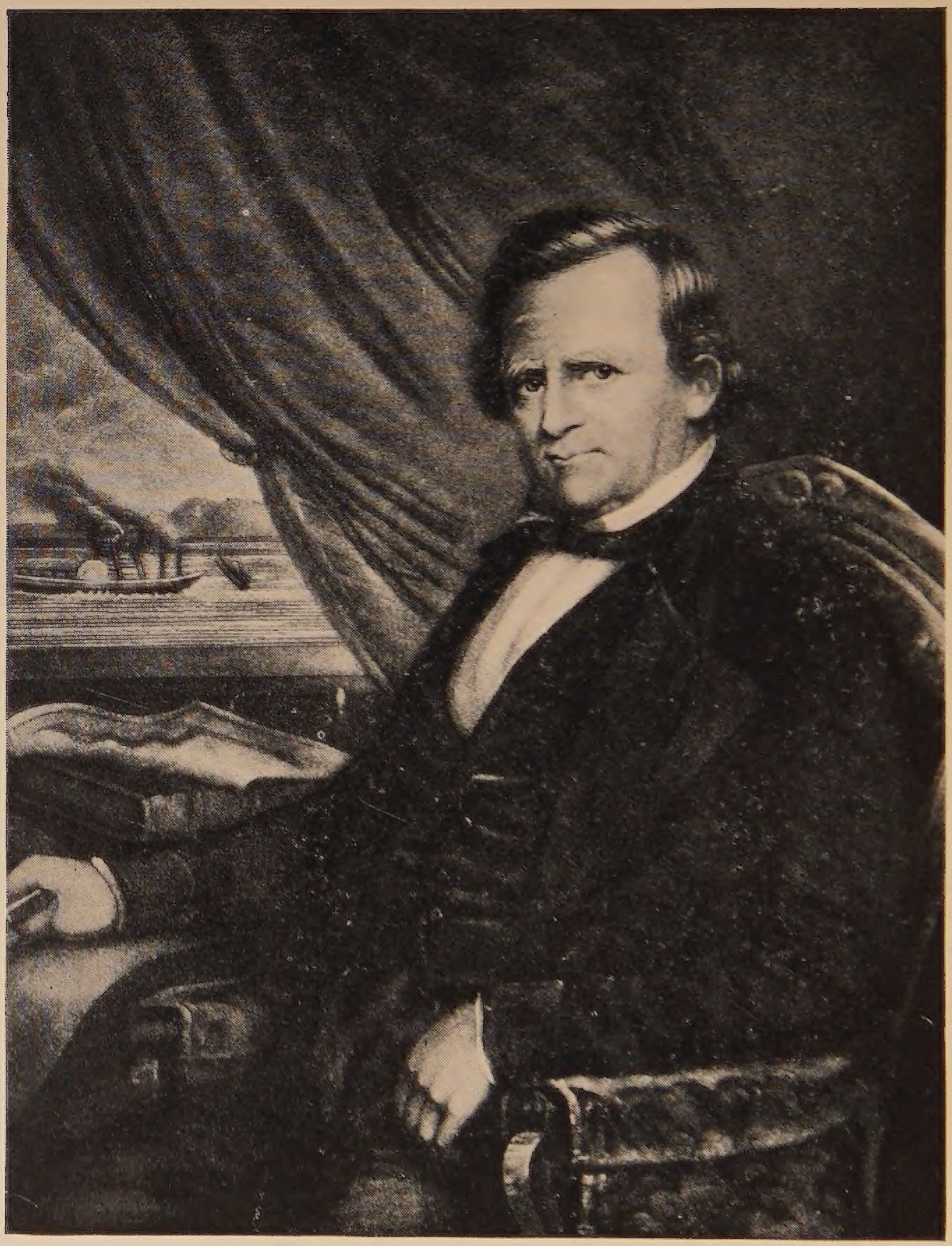


Quart-ah less Twa-a-in!



Mock Twa-a-in!

THE PAGEANT
OF THE PACKETS



HENRY M. SHREVE

The Real Creator of the American Steamboat

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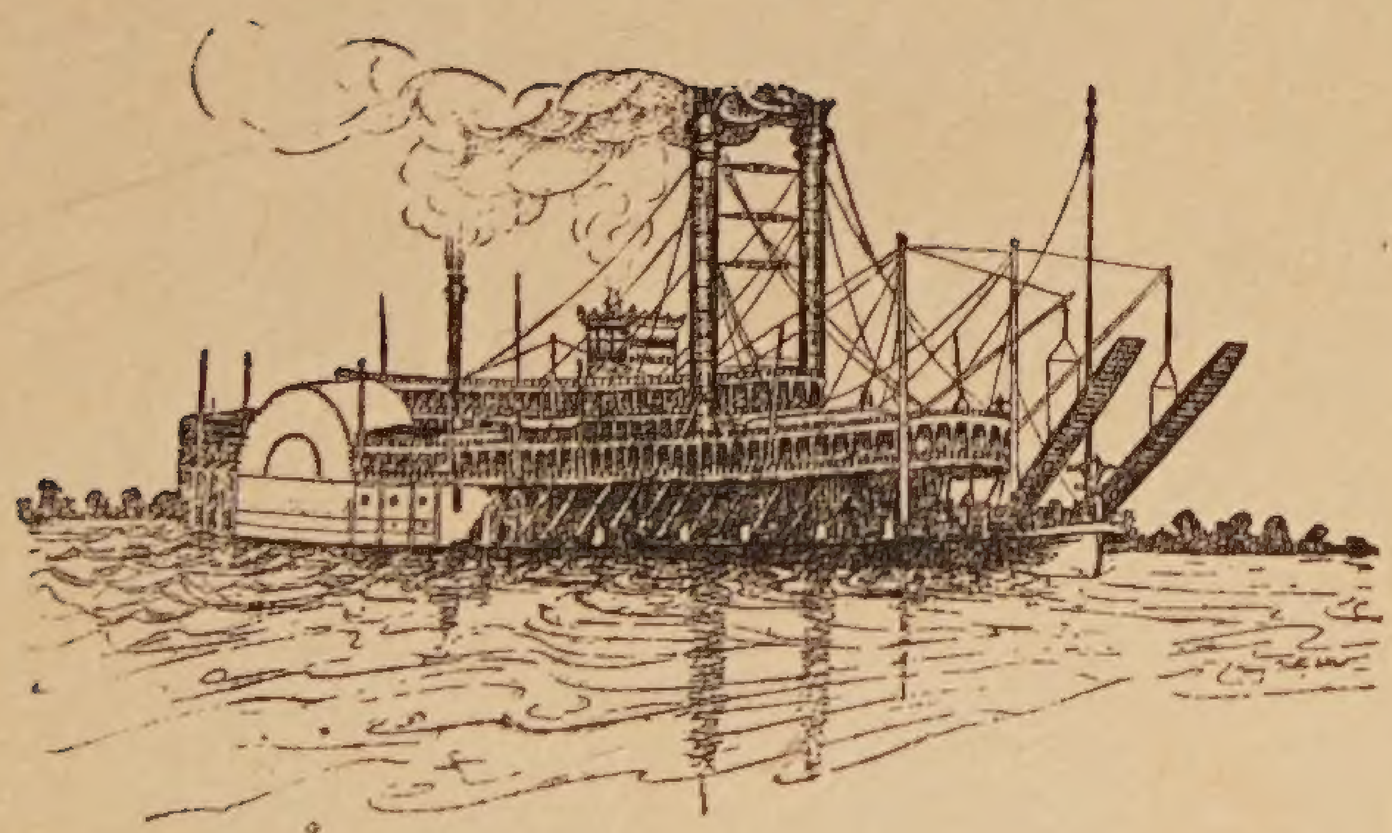
THE PAGEANT OF THE PACKETS

A BOOK OF AMERICAN STEAMBOATING

BY

GARNETT LAIDLAW ESKEW

DECORATIONS BY NANCY BEATTY ESKEW



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NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

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To

Father and Mother
and
the Commodore of
the White Collar Line

FOREWORD

DOWN along the river we feel that Mark Twain blew a cylinder head when he wrote "Life on the Mississippi." That may be good writing, river men say, but it is mighty poor steamboatin'. For steamboat men, like salt water sailors, are sticklers for accuracy and are inclined to resent anything but a full measure of appreciation for their vessels.

A few years ago I made a six-hundred-mile trip on the Ohio. It was my first voyage on a river packet since leaving home to "ship out" on the Great Lakes and later the Atlantic Ocean. In the process of "shipping out" I had accumulated a marine engineer's license for Diesel engines; for several months I had been a donkeyman on a windjammer; and finally the Navy had stuffed me with interesting data about steam turbines and vacuum augmentors. In fact, I rolled slightly as I walked, so that when I found myself back on the river, it seemed only fair to give the home folks the benefit of my experience.

Then the old-timers took me in hand and gently pointed out that most of the improvements I suggested had been tried out years ago when the "big boats" were running. Eventually I became convinced that the Western River steamboat was not

only the background for some good yarns but was the most ingenious power vessel ever created. Surely, it is America's most distinctive contribution to marine architecture, and a little research work will convince students of marine engineering that, from the introduction of steam until sometime after the Civil War, the great American rivers were the testing laboratories of the steamship.

Not only, as Mr. Eskew points out, was the river tonnage once greater than England's sea-borne commerce, but, ship for ship, river boats were once faster, better equipped, and in many cases larger than contemporary deep-sea tonnage. For instance, in 1842 the *J. M. White* could do twenty miles per hour on the Mississippi. In 1862 the U. S. Navy built the *Kearsarge* to catch the *Alabama*. The *Kearsarge* was unusually fast for salt water: she could steam sixteen knots. This kind of information is, of course, merely incidental to Mr. Eskew's gorgeous story, but it will gratify river men and there will be great rejoicing in the land of the willow and the cottonwood that a writer has finally been discovered who really knows the steamboat from timber head to fantail and who appreciates boats as boats, in addition to being charmed by the Coonjine songs of the rousters, the mellow chords of the whistles, and that gentle air of stately courtesy that still clings to the river packet.

STANLEY WALKER.

June 25, 1929.

CONTENTS

PART ONE

HOW STEAMBOATS CAME TO THE RIVERS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	What Robert Fulton Did Not Invent	3
II.	Livingston Doubles a Country's Area	16
III.	Fulton's Failure	24
IV.	Enter the Steamboat Builder	31
V.	The First Real Steamboat	44
VI.	The *Washington*	51

PART TWO

MANY LITTLE BOATS

I.	Steamboats Open the West	61
II.	First Steps in Steamboat-engine Building	71
III.	Boys, Get the Business!	78

PART THREE

GAY AND GALLANT DAYS UPON THE RIVER

I.	Uncle Jim Howard	87
II.	Gamblers and Quality Folk	97
III.	Steamboats and Politicians	109
IV.	High Tide of Steamboating	121

CONTENTS

PART FOUR

THE BATTLE OF THE BOATS

CHAPTER — PAGE

I. The Battle of the Boats 137

PART FIVE

SECOND WIND

I. Steamboats Come Back Despite Mark Twain 161

II. Golden Days in the Cotton Country . . 175

III. The Race of the *Robert E. Lee* 182

IV. Leathers, Cannon, Tobin and the *J. M. White* 199

V. More Racing and "Off-shore Hospitality" . 209

VI. How They Built the Steamboats . . . 223

VII. The Commodore and the Old White Collar Line 231

VIII. Roustabout, Coonjine and de Steamboats . 251

IX. Paying Toll to the Old Mother . . . 269

PART SIX

STEAMBOATING TODAY

I. Towing on the Western Rivers . . . 285

II. Putting Old Mother to Work Again . . 297

Sources Consulted 313

ILLUSTRATIONS

Henry M. Shreve	*Frontispiece*
	OPPOSITE PAGE
Sunrise on the Levee	44
Louisville and Cincinnati Packet *Indiana*	62
The Cabin of the *Grand Republic*	100
The *City of Louisville*	140
The Famous Old Sidewheeler *Sultana*	140
The Finest of Them All, the *J. M. White*	162
Captain Cooley's *America* at New Orleans	178
The Race Between the *Natchez* and the *Robert E. Lee*	190
Menu of the Famous Packet *Ed. Richardson*	206
Busy Days on the Levee at New Orleans	262

AMERICAN STEAMBOATS

Theirs was no beauty of sharp prows and spars
Or bowsprits slanting upward towards the stars,
Porthole, or squat huge funnel, rakish mast
Sky-scraping to catch clouds that linger past;
Nor theirs the beauty of the deep keels that go
Cutting far down beneath the ocean's flow,
Cleaving the gusty rollers right and left,
Mounting each green hill as its crest is cleft
To settle troughward with each passing swell! . . .
Ships of the sea I loved not half so well
As these:—who wore strange beauty all their own—
The mighty river boats that I have known
And have long lost, save that I still may find
Their mirrored likenesses within my mind.

Can you not hear them now—their blended notes
Fluting at dawn from steam-stained copper throats
Over the water, up the shelving bank,
By forest ways and fields yet dewy dank,
Through the hushed town and yet unpeopled street,
In at your window? Music mellow and sweet!
Where shall I find it—that strange music, gone,
Of steamboat whistles blowing in the dawn?

Can you not see them still, airy and white,
Tall-chimneyed, surface-gliding, moving light
As shallops on ten thousand miles of river?
Scarcely their passing made the surface quiver
In lessening bright waves. Now they are gone!
Each to its destined fate—a proud white swan.
And we who loved them look for them in vain
On now unburdened rivers. . . . Ah, not again
Shall tawny streams, once crowded with their weight,
Bear gulfward river argosies of freight
In the great packets! No, nor shall there be

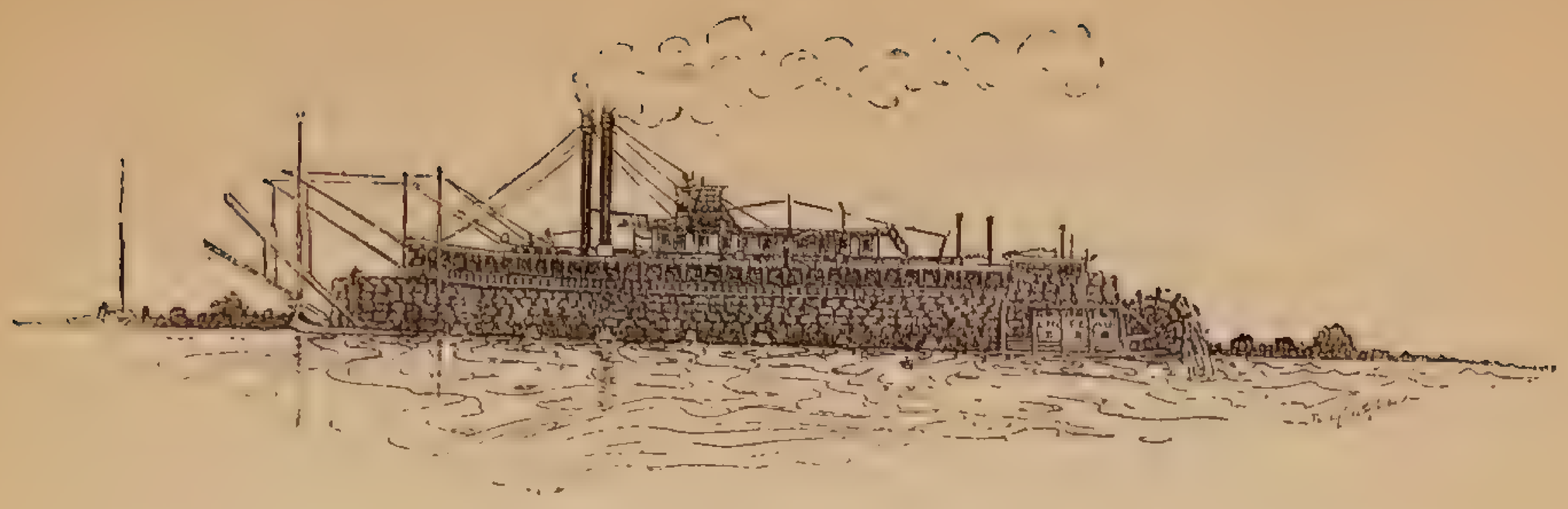
That flounced, side-whiskered aristocracy
Of ladies, captains, judges, gentlemen—
A gay proud people, on their decks—as when
Those swift white steamboats yet supplied their need
And twenty miles an hour was reckoned speed!

Yet here on silent nights I think there floats
A ghostly company of lovely boats
(Dark shapes, against a dark like amethyst!
Still misty hulls, yet whiter than the mist!)
And moving on the channels without sound
Great wheels ply endlessly around, around,
While neither waves nor ripples rise and die
To show the mystery of their passing by!

GARNETT LAIDLAW ESKEW.

PART ONE

HOW STEAMBOATS CAME TO THE RIVERS



CHAPTER I

WHAT ROBERT FULTON DID NOT INVENT

MY love for steamboats began very shortly after I did.

It must have been somewhere in the vicinity of my third birthday—it was during one of the early Bryan campaigns—that mother took me on my first steamboat trip. And I have two or three fairly distinct and vivid recollections of that 300-mile voyage on the old *Henry M. Stanley* from Charleston on the Kanawha to Cincinnati on the Ohio.

One of these memories is of the long cabin of the *Stanley*, high fore and aft, and dipping, sheering gracefully to a low point in the center; of the huge steering wheel in the pilot house before which a silent man stood who would on occasion push a pedal on the floor and make the whistle emit its roar which, at some distance, is the prettiest music in the world. You could look from the pilot house and see directly in front the tall twin smokestacks banded around with white collars.

I can remember, of that first steamboat trip, standing on the hurricane deck, held fast by a black and

buxom chambermaid and watching the *Stanley's* sternwheel kicking up mighty waves in our rear. I can remember the genial Captain Talbot seating my mother gallantly at his right—the place of honor, as befits the younger sister of the owner of this boat and many others—at dinner.

But more clearly than anything else in that hazy, semi-opaque mirror into which I look to find my earliest impressions of steamboating, I recall this: Captain Talbot's lifting me up upon the piano in my little Scottish kilt costume and my electioneering for Bryan. That section of West Virginia, then as now, was pretty evenly divided on politics, but whether they were for Bryan or McKinley it is on record that the entire coterie of half a hundred cabin passengers applauded my efforts. Just the other day my father, looking through a sheaf of old papers, found a folded yellow campaign picture of the Commoner as he appeared at that time "young and beautiful as Apollo," on the back of which father had written thirty years ago my campaign speech:

"Let every man vote for William Jennings Bryan who believes in the free coinage of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one! Thank you, thank you ladies and gentlemen (here bowing with my hand at salute to my forehead) for your kind attention."

Well, . . . the good Commoner has gone to his reward. And somewhere in the muddy depths of the Ohio River not far below Gallipolis and the point where the blue Kanawha merges its identity with the

larger stream, the remains of the old *Henry M. Stanley* gradually disintegrate under the pressure of the ever-encroaching waters. Up until a few years ago it was possible to see the crowns of her ornamented smokestacks rising pathetically above low water.

But now the rivers have accomplished their work. Through the windows of her once gay cabin the catfish and sunfish and eel must hold high revelry. Her engines are clogged with river ooze. Her great wheel that onced threshed the river like a bright colossal churn has parted from the shafts and drifted away. She is merely one of the thousands of steamboat wrecks which the waters hold secret until that day when the rivers roll back and the sea gives up its own.

From the time I was old enough to run away from home for a few hours at a time and discover the world that lay beyond the tall gateposts and paling fence of our home, I sought the levee.

The levee—pronounced "levvy," if you please—to down-river folk, is a great man-made wall paralleling the river to keep out the periodic overflows. Which it does sometimes. To those of us who live on the upper tributaries of the Mississippi, the levee means simply the steamboat landing. In our section we needed no walls to keep out the river's overflows, for the Kanawha's bluff banks defy all but the highest stages of water.

Our levee was a fascinating place. It wasn't far from home either. You had only to walk a few hundred feet down Laidley Street; cut across State Street

and Union School yard; slide quickly through my great Uncle Jim Brown's orchard and under the gnarled elms that bordered his driveway; proceed out Alderson Street to Front Street. And there you were. Front Street runs along on the top of the bluffs, and standing there, you could look down on the levee—a stone-and-gravel-paved causeway at the foot of which Donally's wharf boat lay in close to bank, stationary but floating, tethered to the bank so that it would rise and fall with the river. A huge stageplank led from the bank to the wharfboat's great entrance, and over the stageplank all day long there came and went a motley procession of vehicles—drays and produce wagons and delivery carts, ice wagons and lumbering "floats."

And tied at the wharfboat, or a few hundred feet away, were nearly always a number of steamboats. The roustabouts, when the boat was loading or unloading, would keep up a continual movement on and off the decks. There were always a number of passengers in those days as well as a vast amount of miscellaneous freight.

Beyond, on the farther bank of the Kanawha, ran the tracks of the railroad; and occasionally, as you stood on the street a block or two above Dr. Jim Roger's Drug Store and near Mr. Will Goshorn's hardware establishment, there flashed into the station over the rails the yellow-car trains of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. I found such a sight interesting always, for in the summer time father would take the

family over those same rails to White Sulphur or Atlantic City. But mainly it was the levee—the river and the boats—that interested me.

I was too young in those days and for a long time afterwards to realize the portents of this scene: the placid-flowing, willow-lined Kanawha with its tall-chimneyed packets and, paralleling it, within a stone's throw the steel ribbons that bore the trains away. There they were in immediate juxtaposition: the boats and the railroads. It did not enter my young head that steamboating was even then on its decline and had been for twenty years due to the encroachments of the railroads. Or, that within fifteen or twenty years all these boats would be gone, and even the plodding towboats which convoyed acres of coal barges at a clip down the river to Cincinnati would practically have disappeared. Nor again, that within another ten or fifteen years (it is happening as I write) the boats would again put in an appearance on the river, not as competitors of the railroads, but as auxiliaries to handle a bulk of freight which the railroads cannot accommodate as cheaply and as satisfactorily, and to carry tourist-passengers who are turning again to the rivers for the pleasure of water travel which their grandparents knew.

No, it was the boats that took my fancy in those days as they have ever since. Not the railroads. The boats were so much more beautiful for one thing, and were so much bigger. There was the *Lizzie Bay*, long and slender as a girl, and the *Kanawha*, strong and

dependable, both making weekly trips to Pittsburgh. There was my old friend, the *Henry M. Stanley*, massive and stately, and her competitor, the *Tacoma*, somewhat smaller than the *Stanley*, but with a graceful cabin, both doing a good freight and passenger business with Huntington and Cincinnati and those quaint old river towns of Point Pleasant, Gallipolis, and Maysville. And there were the sturdy boats of Captain Gordon Green—the *Greenwood*, the *Greenland*, the officious little *Evergreen*, the *Greendale*, which plied Heaven only knows where and made money.

All these boats were built along the same general lines. They sat flat on the water; they were surmounted by tall black smokestacks set side by side; and to the cabin and superstructure of each there was that graceful dip and sheer so greatly to be desired in the eyes of the Western River steamboatman. Probably the longest was about two hundred and twenty-five feet—the *Stanley*.

In my grandfather's day, I knew, big boats had come up the river from Louisville, Memphis, and the lower Mississippi—the *Moses McClellan* and the *Jacob Strader* from Cincinnati, both giants in their day. The *Strader*, they used to tell me, was so long that it was necessary for her to back forty miles down to the mouth of the Kanawha to turn around!

On the opposite side of the river, as you stood on Front Street, hard by the railroad tracks, Ward's plant was turning out steamboats then, as it had been

doing for the past thirty years, and as it would be doing thirty years hence. Years later, I could not recall a single visit I made to my home city on the Kanawha when there was not a half-finished steamboat lying at the foot of the ways just below Ward's plant. A stranger making a yearly trip to the city and seeing each time a partly finished craft would be likely to exclaim, "They certainly are taking their time to finish that boat!" For during even the leanest days of steamboating, Ward's—one of the oldest shipbuilding plants on the Western Rivers—kept extremely busy turning out steamboats—towboats, packets, lighthouse tenders, etc., for the government.

Old citizens of our town who gathered around the fire of nights at Dr. Jim Rogers' drug store would often lament the fact that there were no more big steamboats on the rivers. To my boyish ears—for I was always on hand to hear old stories of the rivers—there was an inexpressible charm about steamboats and old steamboating days. It never occurred to me that the steamboats on our rivers were markedly different from ships on the ocean or the bays or the lakes. Not until I was almost grown and was in the high school and had commenced to wear peg top trousers that were fashionable in 1907 and 1908, did I know that steamboats were not merely small ships. In 1908 I got my first close-up of an ocean ship, and then I began to realize that the American steamboat is no more like a steamship than a bumble bee is like

a roan mule. The relationship is so distant as to be almost non-existent.

It was at the docks at Newport News, Virginia. A wheezing and officious tugboat and a long black cargo vessel were tied up a few rods from where I stood watching the activities on Hampton Roads. The thing that first surprised me was that these deep-water boats had, comparatively speaking, so little sticking up above the surface of the water! An old seaman in the conventional blue trousers and rough shirt was standing near by and I asked him:

"How much water does that tugboat draw?"

He spat out a yellow stream of tobacco juice and replied:

" 'Bout eighteen feet."

Eighteen feet! Heavens! Our river at home even in flood time had only about nine feet of water in the channel. Our old *Henry M. Stanley* drew only five feet of water, and she was twice as long as this tug-boat and three or four times as high.

"That freighter, over there, draws about twenty-five feet when she's loaded," continued my seaworthy friend.

The freighter in question was around three hundred feet long—not so long as a good many steamboats which still were plying our rivers, even in as late a day as that on which I stood on the docks at Newport News. Save for her two tall masts she lay low in water, her single squat funnel rising only a comparatively few feet above her decks.

This seaman took me on board the cargo ship and showed me the intricate condensing machinery in the hold, explaining to me how the steam could be used over and over again to save fuel. He showed me the mighty propeller shaft extending downward toward the stern so that the propeller protruded low in the water. To a boy raised up on the inland rivers and accustomed to seeing steamboats pushed along by some visible means of propulsion—either a side or sternwheel—all this was mighty surprising. I remember I felt, after I had gone out on the docks again and seen the freighter in motion, like the old negro in New York who saw the ships on the Hudson and, comparing them with the steamboats he had known down home, exclaimed: "How come dem boats ain' got no wheels? Whut make 'em go?"

And no wonder these ships extended so far under water—all that machinery! Enough to operate a half dozen steamboats! There were things in connection with this steamboat business which I couldn't understand. For example, if Robert Fulton is to be recognized as the beginner of practical steam navigation in America, and if all the steam vessels built since are the lineal descendants of his *Clermont* (which was in reality a ship with machinery in the hold) how in the name of all that's wonderful could two so thoroughly different breeds as the steamboats and the steamships have sprung from a common ancestor?

All steamships—craft for deep water—are de-

signed, generally speaking, along the same lines. That is, they are deep draft with the machinery placed in the hold. All the thousands of steamboats which have plied the rivers during the last century differed from one another only in minor details: they too were built along common lines. Their machinery was placed on deck. They always had the twin chimneys placed side by side and they were propelled by double engines. And the proportion that extended under water of each steamboat was very, very small in comparison to that which extended above.

If the steamboat is an outgrowth of the steamship, how is it that the boats increased at a rate which made the tonnage on the rivers in thirty years greater than that on the Atlantic seaboard and the Great Lakes combined? More too, if the steamboat is a development (a side issue, so to speak) of the steamship, it must have developed gradually, evolving from a steamship to a steamboat. And there are no traces of any evolution of this sort.

No, as I grew into manhood and began to dig into this steamboat matter, I found that the steamboat, far from being a bastard descendant of the steamship, sprang full-fledged into being to meet a crisis in the upbuilding of Midland-America. That was after Robert Fulton, having tried futilely to meet it with his steamships, had gone back to New York, disgusted and disheartened to die in 1815. The man who did meet that crisis—the builder of the first

steamboat—is one of that host of forgotten geniuses to whom America owes a debt it will never repay. He was Henry Shreve, and the fame which should justly be his, would rest upon the fact that he learned from Fulton *how not* to build a steamboat, and then, throwing overboard all accepted principles of ship-building, went ahead, built his craft, and launched, although he could not know it, five thousand boats.

And who was Henry Shreve? Ninety-nine out of a hundred persons who read this page never heard of him. There is a thriving city in Louisiana which bears his name, but hardly anybody is aware of that fact, I am afraid. Certainly not the public librarians and officers of the Shreveport Chamber of Commerce to whom one writes for information. We hear much of Robert Fulton, and sometimes of the unfortunate and ingenuous John Fitch, of James Rumsey who showed George Washington that steam would push a vessel, of John Stevens and Morey, and a half dozen other steamship builders, forerunners or contemporaries of Fulton. But who ever hears of Henry Shreve to-day? Not the schoolboy, certainly, thumbing the pages of his dog-eared history. And, beyond all doubt, not the casual seeker after truth. Because, encyclopedias of biography and books of fact preserve a strange silence where Henry Shreve is concerned.

For my part I was never taught that anybody had anything to do with the beginnings of practical steam navigation in the United States except Robert Ful-

ton of New York. New York people believe it to this day, one may assume, for there is little heard to the contrary. School histories are careful not to explain where the steamboats came from, how they got on the Western Rivers, and what they accomplished. Once in a while one finds a casual reference to Robert Fulton's having built the first steam vessel on the Mississippi system, which was undeniably true. But there is never any further explanation to the effect that this first steam vessel, because of its inherent weaknesses, was a flat failure; nor that the rich and racy Westerners were thereupon left with no adequate means of transportation. And it was at this point that Fate brought into the picture—as Fate has a way of doing—the genius necessary to the occasion—Henry Shreve.

A few old books and magazines published in the Middle West in the forties, fifties, and sixties—if you will take the trouble to dig it out—yield up the story of Henry Shreve after much difficult search. He was a man whose life was one of devotion to the upbuilding of the Middle West and South, yet one finds with surprise that he was an Easterner by birth—a New Jersey man, the scion of a family of fighting Quakers. His father, Colonel Israel Shreve, led a regiment in the Revolution while still under forty and had a son of eighteen serving under him as a cub lieutenant.

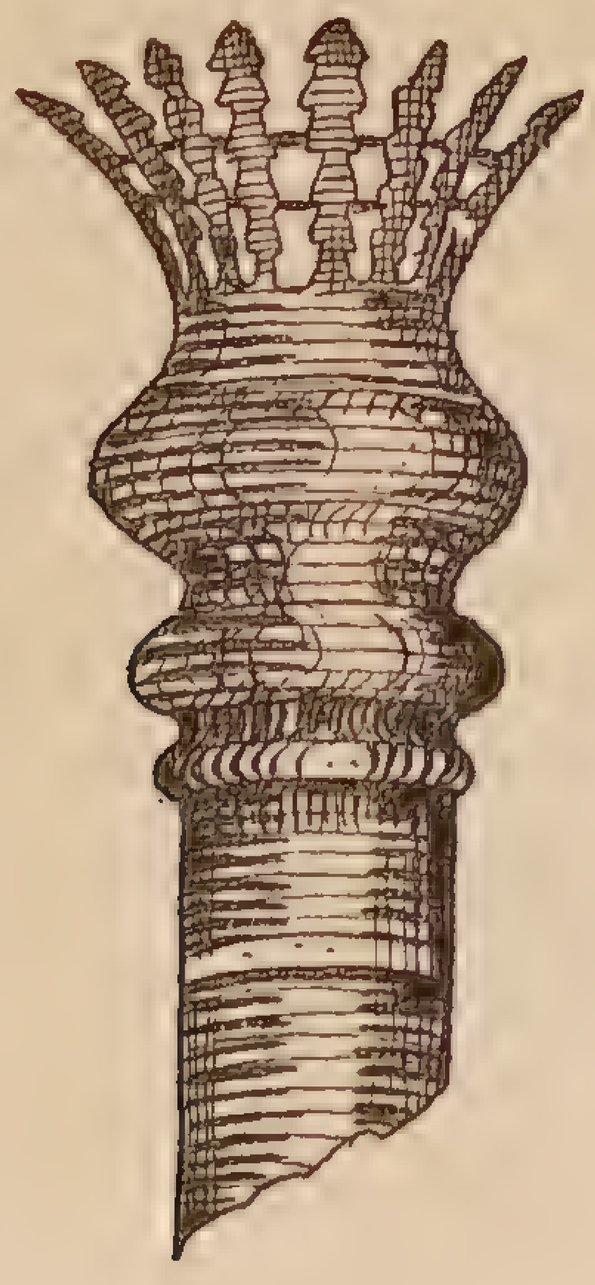
But shortly after the close of the War of Independence, in 1785, the doughty Colonel and his family of six small children joined the ever-increas-

ing westward-pushing wave of immigration. The "West" then was anywhere beyond the Alleghanies. The objective of the wagon which carried the Shreves over the Alleghanies to Brownsville, Pennsylvania, lay at a distance that was about the same as that which a fast train from Pennsylvania Station, New York, could cover in something less than a day. It took the Shreves twenty-four days.

In the family was a two-year-old boy by the name of Henry Miller Shreve.

"Land does not increase much in value here," we find the Colonel writing back to the home folks in the East as soon as he and his brood are settled in Pennsylvania. "People out in this country seem mad to get afloat upon the rivers."

In less than a decade his own son had become a victim of that madness.



CHAPTER II

LIVINGSTON DOUBLES A COUNTRY'S AREA

TO his dying day Napoleon must have thought that he had outsmarted Robert Livingston.

Livingston was in Paris during those portentous years of 1802 and 1803 as special minister for the new and somewhat fresh United States. He was under vague orders from President Jefferson to buy the city of New Orleans. And Jefferson needed this city for a very good and sufficient reason: the thriving settlements of hard-muscled and independent-thinking farmer-shippers of the Mississippi Valley threatened revolt and actual secession unless the city of New Orleans became the property of the United States. For the owner of New Orleans, they well knew, was virtually the owner of the Mississippi River. And, above all things, they wanted the great river as a highway of commerce.

"The Mississippi is ours by the law of Nature," they petitioned Congress. "It belongs to us by our numbers and by the labor we have bestowed upon these spots which before our arrival were barren. We wish to ascend and descend it without interruption. . . . If Congress refuses us effectual protection . . . we will adopt the measures which our

safety requires even if they endanger the peace of the Union. No protection, no allegiance." Thus spoke the forthright dwellers in the Mississippi Valley who had products by the thousands of tons to ship to the Gulf city for export!

"New Orleans is the only place on the American continent, the possessor of which is the natural enemy of the United States," writes Jefferson to his Paris minister. And he added in effect, "Get it for me."

And so the wheels of diplomacy began slowly to grind in Paris. Livingston and James Madison, the ambassador, haunted the courts of the First Consul, dogging the footsteps of Talleyrand, Napoleon's Prime Minister. Napoleon was more than anxious to get rid not only of the mouth of the Mississippi but the entire Louisiana territory as well. It was, he knew, a desolate and barren tract, reaching off by the thousands of square miles to infinity, from the Mississippi River westward, and recently obtained from Spain. But he must not appear too anxious.

"You may have the whole business for one hundred million francs and certain other considerations," said Talleyrand and Marbois to Livingston, while Napoleon held his breath in the offing. He needed that American gold, did Napoleon! How he needed it for wars he was planning with England!

But Livingston argued the price down to eighty million francs (fifteen million dollars) and James Monroe and James Madison with Livingston and

Marbois signed the treaty. Louisiana became America's!

At about four cents an acre Livingston obtained for the United States a territory which more than doubled its extent. Very little was known of this territory—beyond the fact that it was inhabited along the river banks by scattered settlements of French and Spanish squatters, by buffalo and red Indians. Numerous rivers, a grumbling Congress knew, traversed the section, but they knew also—these law makers in Washington called upon to ratify Livingston's pledge of $15,000,000—that this territory could never pay dividends!

But Livingston, the astute New Yorker—wealthy, influential, far-seeing—how deep into the future did he see? There is some evidence to show that in making the purchase of Louisiana he saw only the city of New Orleans and heard only the complaints voiced by the farmer-shippers of the great Valley. One wonders to-day if, even then, he did not see the possibilities of wealth that would accrue to himself if he proceeded rightly.

That was in 1803. Four years later Livingston saw aplenty! He saw Robert Fulton on the Hudson sail his steamship *Clermont* up and down stream. And straightway his thoughts must have reverted to the possibilities of that undeveloped stretch of country beyond the Great River; for the speed with which he set to work to build up what he intended to be the largest commercial monopoly the world had

yet seen indicates that he must have kept his own interests in mind all along. For Livingston dreamed dreams of empire—a commercial empire, wealth beyond the hope of any business organization the struggling new nation yet possessed. And why? Because he—Livingston—would have to offer the people of the Mississippi Valley something which they needed beyond anything else—a means of transportation.

There moved upon the face of the rivers in those early days a huge but precarious commerce. Flatboats by the thousands were being floated down to New Orleans carrying the products of the up-river country to market at New Orleans. Hastily knocked together craft they were, these flatboats, built at a cost of probably twenty dollars each (for timber was cheap and plentiful along the rivers), but capable of carrying several tons of the things produced by the Ohio River farmers and manufacturers.

Had you stood on the Ohio's shore at Louisville you would have seen them floating by in charge of the dauntless flatboatmen who manned the great oars or shifted the sails while the little brown jug passed frequently from hand to hand. You would have seen keelboats, slender and fairly graceful, being warped upstream on their two-thousand-mile journey from the Gulf. You would have seen a schooner or a barque making the best of its way back into the wilderness, having come from overseas, its full canvas spread to catch the wind necessary to propel it upward against a current that swept it back one and

a half feet for every two feet it moved forward. You would have seen, piled along the banks at the infrequent towns, cargoes of freight waiting to be moved southward.

And the only possible means of moving that freight were the current-propelled flatboats or keelboats. And a slow, laborious, and dangerous business it was—shipping goods on the river in those days! Yet for all that, the West—the old West—was growing, stretching itself like an ungainly colt with a pleased surprise that there were new pastures to be discovered.

Indeed, the West had been growing since the first pioneers crossed the Alleghanies before the Revolutionary War. Twenty years after the first westward-pushers arrived from the Atlantic seaboard, the Ohio River country was producing a surplus of crops and looking about for a place to market it. The seaboard cities and foreign countries, they knew, wanted that surplus. Yet how to deliver it? One had to float it by water two thousand miles through desolate wilderness inhabited by hostile Indians to New Orleans and there reload the cargo into sailing ships for a sea voyage.

Yet, even so, had you been in New Orleans in as early as 1788, you could have bought Ohio River products shipped down by flatboat. In that year a quarter of a million dollars' worth of such products arrived at the Crescent City's wharves. Philadelphia and New York wholesale markets maintained agents

in New Orleans to purchase these goods as they arrived.

The cities had grown, their activities expanded so by 1798 that Pittsburgh, Marietta, Losantiville (Cincinnati), and Louisville sent down to New Orleans more than three-quarters of a million dollars' worth of produce.

From that time on, the flatboats multiplied surprisingly. They were a hugely prolific lot! Frequently they assembled at St. Louis in fleets and, sometimes lashed together, floated away southward. An inspiring picture it must have been to the isolated dwellers on the river to see such a fleet float by, the hardy crew singing at their wearying labor.

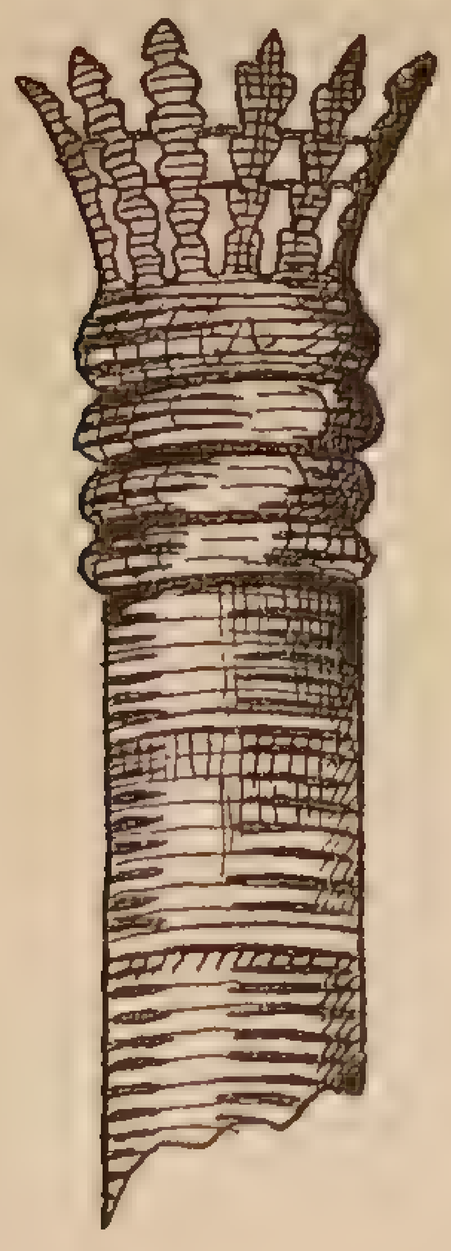
Two hundred and sixty-five strong the flatboats brought an array of assorted merchandise to New Orleans in 1802 such as that enterprising city had never seen before! Five years later, while Robert Fulton was preparing to negotiate the placid Hudson with his *Clermont* steamship, five and a half million dollars, represented in a varied assortment of wares and carried in three hundred and forty flatboats and barges, docked somewhere in the neighborhood of what is now the foot of Canal Street in New Orleans. And Livingston was now devoting all his energies to furthering his mighty project. Had he seen the following list—compiled years later—of the merchandise that reached New Orleans from up river in a single season in flatboats and barges, his efforts would likely have redoubled.

Cargoes passing the Falls of the Ohio at Louisville between October 5, 1810, and May 5, 1811, bound down stream to New Orleans, carried in 847 vessels, mainly flatboats:

Articles	
Flour, barrels	206,855
Bacon, pounds	1,008,026
Whiskey, barrels	15,797
Cider, barrels	4,193
Pork, barrels	22,602
Apples, barrels	4,200
Oats, barrels	6,700
Corn, barrels	79,695
Merchandise (general)	592,640
Cheese, boxes	8,569
Beans, barrels	1,010
Lumber, feet	2,325,210
Live hogs	1,513
Cider royal, barrels	2,250
Butter, pounds	41,151
Lard, pounds	775,000
Onions, barrels	364
Potatoes, barrels	3,019
Hemp, cwt.	1,050,492
Dried Fruit, barrels	442
Yarn and Cordage, pounds	189,020
Fowls	2,012,224
Shoe Thread, pounds	4,320
Country Linen, pounds	13,066
Horses	489
Beer, barrels	459
Tobacco, hogsheads	3,891

Livingston became Fulton's financial backer.

Hooked up with Nicholas Roosevelt, great-grand-uncle of a future president, the Easterners crossed the Alleghanies in a stagecoach. A rough and tumble journey of some weeks it must have been; but ahead, lay smooth waters and an excellent opportunity for gaining wealth. They had something definite to offer the cities of the Ohio and the Mississippi—the new, rapidly upbuilding cities. And they were to ask of the valley people in return something equally definite.



CHAPTER III

FULTON'S FAILURE

LIVINGSTON'S demands were not what you would call modest. His proposition, which he laid before the governors of each of the river states in the West, was this: "Fulton, Roosevelt, and I will build and operate steam vessels on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and later on their tributaries. In return for this we demand the sole right to navigate those rivers with steam craft."

An ambitious request, that; and an unheard of one! At least, so it rings upon our modern ears. But there were no anti-trust regulations in those days. Monopolies and concessions from the government were the order of the day. The Livingston combine, as a matter of fact, already had virtually the same patent from New York, that state having granted it the sole right to the rivers within its boundaries for a period of fourteen years. Which meant, in other words, that steam craft belonging to any one else could not ply the waters of New York, without paying a heavy duty to Mr. Livingston and company! And well that arrangement was paying them, too! Fulton boats (backed by Livingston dollars) were plying the

eastern waters and rolling up the loveliest profits for their owners!

Thus there was some reason for Livingston's believing the Western River states would grant what he asked for. They had so very much to gain and so little to lose. They had heard these past five or six years so much of the steamship and its builders that they would welcome the eastern promoters with open arms. So must have run the thoughts of Robert Livingston as, bumping noisily in that stagecoach over the Alleghany fastnesses in 1809, he and his companions approached the river territory. Fulton and Roosevelt were no less enthusiastic for the launching of their great scheme.

And as we look back upon those days and transactions from our vantage point of the present, it is really a surprising thing that the governors of the river states did not accede to the demands of the Easterners. They were just then beginning to realize the hitherto undreamed of potentialities of their farms and factories and mills. If the plodding, slow-moving flatboats consuming three weeks on the down-voyage to New Orleans and six on the up-voyage (provided they were able to come back up at all), could roll up a profit for the farmer-shippers, what could steamships not do for them! Thousands of tons of produce rotted and rusted on the river landings waiting to be moved to market. Steam craft on the Mississippi and the Ohio would solve the problem.

But there were two facts rooted deep in the consciousness of these pioneering groups who had settled along the rivers which Livingston seems not to have grasped. One of these facts was a deep-seated distaste for the levying of any sort of tribute upon them. That same passion for freedom of movement, which had driven them over the mountains from the Atlantic seaboard to settle this wide, lonely country of the Great Valley, had made the river people demand of Jefferson and Congress the possession of the rivers for their own purposes. They were, in point of fact, not far removed in spirit from that famous tea-party matter in Boston harbor some twenty-five years before. That fiasco had had its beginnings in the payment of duties on imports, you will recall.

Had they demanded and obtained possession of the rivers to avoid the payment of tribute to France and Spain, only to permit Robert Livingston to impose a virtual duty upon them by the operation of his ships on a monopoly basis?

Not by a jugful! Not though they must depend still upon their creeping flatboats and barges!

And the other fact of which these Western River citizens were poignantly aware was the excessively neurotic constitutions of the rivers of the West. They knew from long and bitter acquaintance how swiftly these rivers flow. They did not believe that fire and water could push a boat a hundred feet long and twenty feet wide upstream against those currents for

two thousand miles. And in so many words they said so!

So, of all the governors of the states and territories approached, only one gave the Easterners ear. Governor Claiborne of the Orleans territory (now the state of Louisiana) granted them a patent. In substance it was the same as the patent they had from New York—monopolistic use of the waters in Orleans territory for a period of years.

It is to be supposed that Livingston chuckled. A very satisfying half loaf upon which to content oneself for the time being! Claiborne's patent gave him what to all practical purposes was the possession of the Lower River, that stretch of the Mississippi flowing past the Crescent City—New Orleans, wealthy, shuttlecock of the nations, strategic market place for produce from the entire river empire lying to the northward, the very bone of contention whose existence had been the direct cause of the purchase of Louisiana!

Yes, it is more than likely that Livingston chuckled at this remarkable piece of good fortune and that Fulton and Roosevelt echoed the chuckle. Armed with this patent, they could build ships on the rivers, build up a huge inland merchant marine of their own, transport all the goods of the Western River country to market at New Orleans, free from competition. More too, they could impose a duty upon any steam vessels other than their own which had the temerity to venture from up-river down to New Orleans; and

New Orleans was to be the lodestone for all the up-river trade!

Truly this patent from Claiborne was as good, almost, as the possession of the river in its entirety.

And so, the time being ripe, Livingston went ahead. He devoted all his energy and a great deal of his good money to his dream of controlling the water-borne commerce of the West. And there is no record to show that he ever received a cent in return. The honor for opening up to trade the water roads into the wilderness was to be neither his nor Fulton's.

Livingston sent Fulton off to New York to get out designs for their first ship, and Roosevelt to Pittsburgh to make arrangements for two things—the building of the first vessel and the examination of the first course they were to sail. Six months later, Roosevelt, having floated in a barge from Pittsburgh to New Orleans, returned a report that was exhaustive, capable, and optimistic of success.

Fulton meanwhile had completed the plans for the ship, and Roosevelt at once commenced work on it at Pittsburgh in the early spring of 1811. She was to be called the *Orleans*. Roosevelt laid down her keel on the Alleghany side of the river hard by a bluff known as Boyd's Hill. One hundred and sixteen feet long, twenty feet wide, twenty-four inch cylinder, boilers "in proportion," she was a ship to astound the natives of the West. Her engine resembled nothing so much as a sawmill engine—a queer upright affair known as a "steeple." She had no decks; her ma-

chinery was placed in the hold. Her uncovered side paddle wheels, tall masts, sails and star-slanting bowsprit proclaimed her what she was—an undersized ocean ship.

Contemplating Fulton's activities at this distance, one gathers that he must have possessed a peculiar astigmatism which prevented his visioning the construction of anything save deep-sea ships. To the end of his days apparently he never recognized the futility of attempting to navigate inland rivers with ocean ships. All the more strange, too, when we remember that he had Roosevelt's fresh report before him—the innumerable channel soundings between Pittsburgh and the Gulf.

The result was what any modern marine engineer could have foretold. The *Orleans* slid into the stream and made the unbelievably fast time of fourteen days to New Orleans, amid the rejoicings of the river people who believed now at last they had found their much-needed medium of transportation. Cincinnati, Louisville, and the Mississippi cities hailed Fulton and Roosevelt as the heroes of the age. An old negro, mounting to the top of Chickasaw Bluffs at Memphis as the *Orleans* steamed down towards far away New Orleans, flung his hat in the air and shouted:

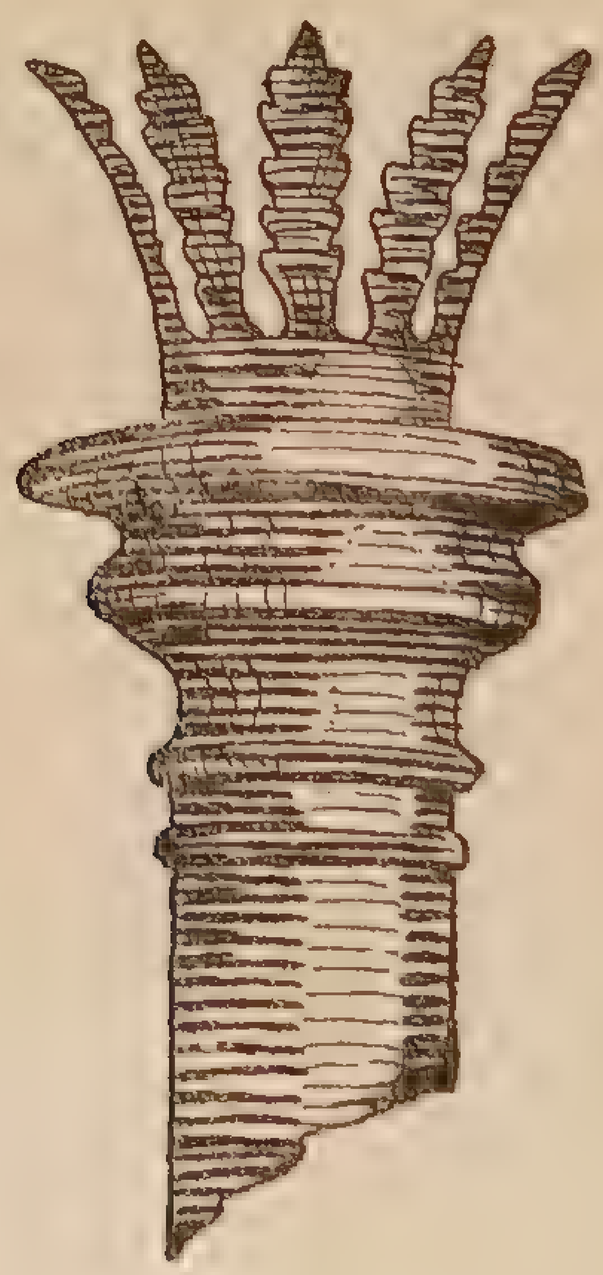
"Yas, Lawd, Ole Miss done found her marster now!"

But he was wrong. Fulton's *Orleans* was undoubtedly a good ship for those days. She was the most astonishing thing anybody along the rivers had

ever seen. "Marvelous," "stupendous," "the wonder of the age," "the herald of a new era in the Great Valley," "an elegant craft"—so ran the newspaper comments of the day. But she had one little defect, one weakness, one peculiarity which was her undoing.

She couldn't come upstream.

Going down she was fine, all agreed. But her weak engines and dragging keel were powerless against the downward sweep of the terrific currents of the Western Rivers. And she wound up ignominiously by doing a small business in the deep-water country between New Orleans and Natchez and, finally striking a snag, went to her death.



CHAPTER IV

ENTER THE STEAMBOAT BUILDER

THE Ohio River, flowing pleasantly west from the point of its formation by the confluence of the Alleghany and Monongahela Rivers at Pittsburgh, dips north a few miles and curves sharply around the top of that northward-thrusting panhandle of West Virginia pushed up like a cleaving wedge between Pennsylvania on the east and Ohio on the west. Then, turning due southward past New Cumberland, Steubenville, and Wellsburg, the Ohio gathers tribute from three states in the form of numerous branches and drains. Forty miles below the top of the Panhandle it slides past the thriving and smoky city of Wheeling.

Wheeling is a modern city in every respect (take notice, you chamber of commerce men), located on the high roads of great railway trunk lines between the East and West. A mark of that modernity is that she seems to have outgrown the river—the great beneficent Ohio, still lapping at her almost deserted wharves. In this, Wheeling bears a striking resemblance to practically all other river cities in these degenerate days. Wheeling is an old town, a very old town. The beginnings of her growth date far

back beyond the railroad era to the time when big white packets, plying regularly between Pittsburgh and the South, paused at her wharfboat. In common with all her older sister cities of the river, she owes much of her growth to the steamboat. Let her wear no air of superiority or patronage as she sits in her pride beside the river that gave her her start!

We wonder if Wheeling knows she is the birthplace of the American steamboat. Is Midland America aware that it is indebted to this West Virginia city for sending from her ways, in the spring of 1816, the first practical, thorough-going river craft, which was to revolutionize transportation in the West—the progenitor of the great white fleet which in thirty years was the wonder of the world?

The chances are no, ten to one.

And the chances are even greater that the rest of the Midlands does not know it. Certainly we are taught nothing to that effect. It is recorded that when the first steamboat took shape on the ways at Wheeling a hundred and twelve years ago, the whole of the surrounding river country came to ridicule her and her builder, Henry Shreve. Not but that there was some reason for it—for that air of amused tolerance assumed by the populace, among whom were experienced ship mechanics from the East, men who had come west with Fulton and French and other shipbuilders—for the craft which Henry Shreve built there on the ways at Wheeling in 1816 violated, in

her make-up, all the accepted principles of shipbuilding. Shreve flung to the winds all precedent.

. . . . . .

For more than three years before he began building this outlandish-looking craft, Shreve had studied all the strange assortment of vessels gliding with the current, tacking before the wind, or laboring under steam from Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh was then the center of barge building. The flatboats and barges had increased and multiplied; lumber rafts with acres of unhewn logs lashed together went by Shreve's little "marine ways" at Wheeling in even greater numbers than they had gone by his Brownsville farm.

Madness to get afloat on the river possessed him early. From his boyhood days, the name of Henry Shreve had been associated with river activities in the West. The time he could spare from running the farm and helping in the support of his family, he prowled around the river front at Brownsville. What the lure of the sea has been to landlocked youth since time immemorial the lure of the river was to Henry Shreve. And the siren song for all the dwellers along the Western Rivers called them Southward toward New Orleans. A trip to New Orleans was a trip to "the city." As for the Atlantic seaboard cities of New York, Philadelphia and Boston, lying half the distance away—they were merely names in a printed book, vague, hazy, uncertain. The new generation of Westerners knew little of them and cared less.

New Orleans was the live, vital city of the heart's desire—the market place of their world.

There had arisen in the West since the Louisiana Purchase a race of merchant-navigators. Building and operating their own fleets of flatboats and keelboats, they shipped the goods they had for market (whether the products of Ohio River mills or Ohio River acres) with a fair amount of frequency down the rivers. They even maintained a crude kind of scheduled regularity. Their crews, having disposed of the flatboat lumber in New Orleans (Old Orleanians recall how the sidewalks of some of the Crescent City's streets were made of these old barge timbers), returned north on foot over the desolate Natchez Trace. On arriving at their home port, these crews found other keelboats and flatboats built, loaded, ready to begin the perilous voyage south, and merchant-navigators always ready to re-employ them.

And it was as a merchant-navigator that Henry Shreve had first made his appearance on the scene in the river drama in which he was to play so important (and forgotten) a part. He was then still in his teens. He built at Brownsville, near his farm, a keelboat of thirty-five tons. With a crew of ten men he set out for St. Louis, a thousand miles down the Ohio and two hundred miles up the Mississippi. He made St. Louis in forty days, disposed of a load of merchandise he had brought along in return for a barge-load of furs, returned home, sent the furs from Pitts-

burgh overland by Conestoga wagon to Philadelphia, cleaning up a handsome profit by the transaction.

This was the beginning of the fur trade between St. Louis and the East, and for three years it yielded young Henry Shreve two things: the life of a navigator which he so much desired and an excellent return in the way of cash.

The British in Canada were then monopolizing the entire trade of the upper Mississippi and a lively exchange of good whiskey and rum for lead, out of which to make British bullets to shoot down American militiamen in the coming War of 1812, went on between Red Men and Red Coats. Old records say that Shreve, when he entered this lead trading business with the Indians, as he did in 1810, carried always a "miscellaneous cargo." But the vast chances are that he had a good deal of fire water from Ohio River distilleries aboard. However that may be, he certainly inaugurated the lead trade between upper Mississippi River points—Fever River, Cape du Gries, Galena River—and New Orleans. Ocean ships in the South were ever ready to carry away to New York and Philadelphia merchants all the lead that Henry Shreve could bring down. From his first lead trading trip he rolled up a profit of something like $11,000, a sizeable sum for a youth just turned twenty-five. That was in 1810.

With his pockets full of money ($11,000 *was* $11,000 in *them* days!) he returned to Brownsville and married Mary Blair. Then with a much larger

keelboat of nearly a hundred tons he began and continued for four years a prosperous general trade with New Orleans, becoming in time an experienced, dependable pilot and navigator.

Meantime, Fulton and Livingston had begun their operations at Pittsburgh, and no one watched with keener interest the progress of shipbuilding than did Captain Henry Shreve. Between trips he spent hours on the ways at Pittsburgh studying the bulky intricate machinery which went into the hull of the *Orleans* and trying, beyond all doubt, to visualize this ungainly ocean ship in the mazes of the snag-ridden, shoal-infested channel of the Great River.

And it is more than likely—though there is nothing on record to show it positively to be so—that he had many an argument with dauntless Nick Roosevelt, Fulton's engineer in charge of the *Orleans*, on the feasibility of navigating the rivers by steam.

And when in 1812 the *Orleans* demonstrated her inability to come upstream after her down voyage to New Orleans, it is to be imagined that Shreve—although like Brer Fox, he "ain' say nothin',"—murmured to himself over and over again, "I knew it! I knew it!"

It must have been about this time that Captain Shreve began to turn his thoughts to the building of a steamboat of his own design. Whether the idea of a river steamboat came suddenly to him, as did the sleeping-car berth idea to the mind of young George Pullman years later as he lay tossing in a flat uncom-

fortable bunk on a night trip in New York state, we have no way of knowing. Probably not. More than likely the decision Shreve finally arrived at was cumulative—the result of three years of study and examination between long and wearing river trips.

Another shipbuilder had put in an appearance at the headwaters of the Ohio. Daniel French had patented a steamship engine with an oscillating cylinder. In 1813 he installed it in a little ship known as the *Comet*, tacked a sternwheel on her rear parts, and sent her wheezing off southward to try her luck on the rivers. The whole business weighed about twenty-five tons. The *Comet's* career was short. Arriving at New Orleans in the early days of 1814, she loaded up with a general cargo and started back north; but like her predecessor, the *Orleans*, she couldn't make it beyond Natchez. After two trips between these two down-river cities, she was sold, dismantled, her engine put in a cotton gin on a nearby plantation, and forgotten.

But her soul went marching on. Daniel French, located at Brownsville, had faith in his oscillating cylinder contraption, and would not give up. He formed a company known as the Monongahela Steam Navigation Company and took in Henry Shreve on a partnership basis. Still using old records as our authority, we learn that Shreve wanted merely to experiment with French's engine with a view to finding out why it couldn't push a ship upstream and then to profit by that knowledge. He became captain

of French's second boat, the *Enterprise*, forty-five tons,—the fourth ship built in the West, Fulton and Livingston having only a few months before sent into the water at Pittsburgh their second pre-doomed craft the *Vesuvius*, the third on Western waters.

The merchant-navigator had now become a steamship captain. Down through the mazes of the Ohio channel to Cairo, down the thousand-mile waste of flooded Mississippi to the port of New Orleans, he took the *Enterprise* without mishap. That in itself —considering that he accomplished the feat in less than two weeks—was something to brag of. But Shreve did not brag, for he knew the real tug of war was just ahead of him—the long climb back to the Ohio cities.

But he was destined to remain longer in New Orleans than ever he had dreamed. Full six months were to elapse before he could begin his voyage northward. He found the city in a state of siege and under martial law, her fiery and harassed commander, Andrew Jackson, alternately swearing and praying for more troops to beat off the British invaders whose ships had come in through Lake Borgne and Lake Ponchartrain and were even then disgorging troops to subdue the beleaguered city. Every able-bodied man had been pressed into service. Henry Shreve, with his new steamship, stood about as much chance of escaping the eagle eye of Old Hickory as a Kentucky squirrel had of escaping the rifle bead of a contem-

porary "Kaintuck" mountaineer. He and his vessel were immediately requisitioned and put to work.

But even before the General could issue any definite order the terrified populace of non-combatants had crowded about the young shipmaster and begged to be carried out of the city to a place of safety before the bombing commenced. This Shreve agreed to do. He obtained Jackson's permission, loaded a crowd on the *Enterprise*, and was just on the point of setting off up the river when a courier arrived summoning the Captain to the presence of the Commandant.

What manner of man was Henry Shreve? We know so little of him! His only extant portrait shows him a plumpish, sleek, middle-aged gentleman with a good mouth, shrewd humorous eyes and sizeable *embonpoint* filling out a flowered waistcoat. And such undoubtedly was the Henry Shreve of later years. Mid-life brought him solid honors from three presidents. But such could not have been the dauntless young navigator, not yet turned thirty, who turned fiercely to the messenger from General Jackson and told him, in words that amounted to just about that, to go to hell.

"The courier returned to the old chief," says James Parton in his *Life of Andrew Jackson*, "and detailed to him the Captain's refusal. In a towering passion the General ordered a file of men to arrest the Captain and bring him into his presence.

"Little time elapsed before the now enraged Captain stood in the presence of the General. The latter, fiercely eyeing Captain Shreve, in a voice husky with intense passion, made the inquiry:

"'By ——, Captain Shreve, do you dare disobey my orders?'

"'Yes, by ——, I do dare!' was the vehement reply of the undaunted Captain.

"Jackson could not repress the expression of surprise which spread itself over his face at this unexpected reply of the daring Captain, and in a tone of voice considerably milder than his first bade Shreve explain his conduct. Upon the explanation being given, Jackson dismissed Shreve, simply saying that he had forgotten his promise to the citizens whose wives and children Captain Shreve then had on his vessel waiting to be moved to a place of safety."

But Henry Shreve's display of spirit seems to have won for him the regard of the imperious Jackson. Possibly, eyeing his visitor from head to foot, Old Hickory found something in the aspect and demeanor of the young up-river Mid-West Captain that touched an answering chord in his own rugged Tennessee bosom. He probably mused something like this:

"If this lad has guts enough to look *me* in the eye and cuss back, he must be all right!"

A few days later, on January 3, 1815, we find Jackson summoning Shreve again to his headquarters in the old Macarty mansion. He was bending over a rough map of the port defenses of the city.

"Captain Shreve, they tell me you are a man who always does what he sets out to do. Can you, with that steamship of yours, pass the British batteries along the river and carry supplies to Fort St. Philip? It's nine miles below town."

Shreve pondered a moment:

"I can if I may have my own time in which to do it."

"How much time do you require?"

"Twenty-four hours."

And twenty-four hours was sufficient. That night the *Enterprise*, heavily buttressed with cotton bales against possible attack from the masked British shore batteries, stole away and carried supplies to the fort. "Only a few spent balls," says Parton, "reached the protecting cotton bales."

Four days later Jackson, in recognition of this accomplishment, clapped upon Shreve's brawny shoulders a pair of Captain's straps and posted him out at Chalmette. During the heaviest fighting on January 8 in the bloody and useless battle of New Orleans, his guns and gunners, in Colonel Humphrey's battalion of artillery, did some pretty effective work on the advancing column of General Keene's grenadiers.

Not until May 6, after the war was long over and all who had been impressed for government service were released, did the *Enterprise* nose her way out of New Orleans harbor past Nine Mile Bend and up into the open river beyond.

Henry Shreve was boldly setting out to conquer the currents of the Western Rivers with a steamship —something that had been tried three times previously and in vain. One wishes there were more detailed accounts of that twenty-six-day rigorous voyage up to Louisville, so that we might know the daily progress of the ship to the North! But there is little on record concerning it. The river was in flood, high enough to permit the *Enterprise* to make some progress ahead without dragging her keel too deeply in the river mud. On a normal stage of water she could never have accomplished the feat she did—even with so gifted a commander as Henry Shreve.

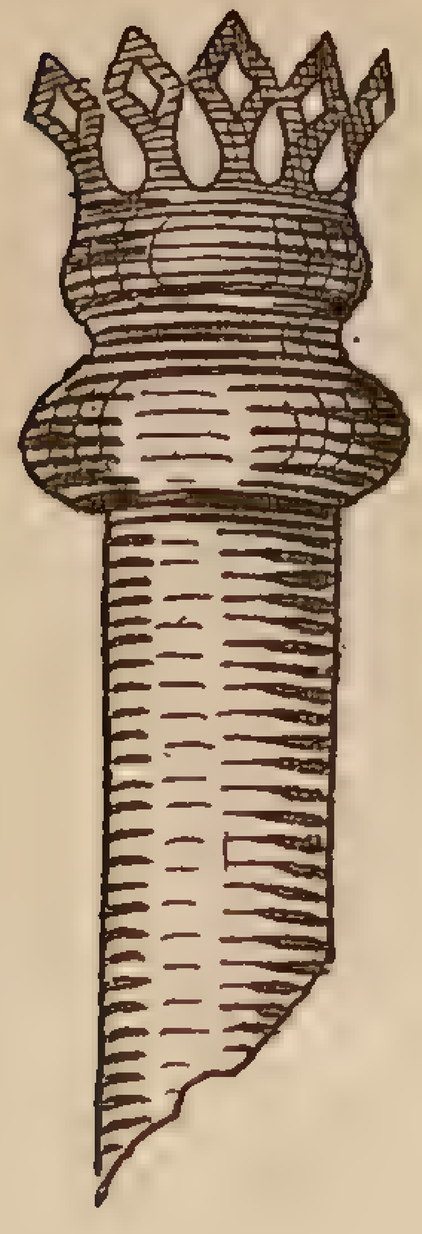
On May 30, 1815, the *Enterprise* docked at Louisville, "limping into port" literally, decidedly the worse for wear—the first steam vessel to come upstream. And Henry Shreve had brought her up.

Small comfort he must have got from contemplating his voyage after its completion! Little good it did him or anyone else! The trip added gray hairs to his head. The *Enterprise's* weak engines had to battle for the slightest purchase against the downsweeping currents. At times her movement upstream was hardly perceptible. Her deep prow and mud-digging keel hindered her progress at every bar. Her auxiliary sails helped not at all. She was all wrong, Henry Shreve knew, and by the merest chance had he been able to get her up to Louisville. Down deep in his soul he told himself that "Ole Miss" had not yet found her "Marster." No. Something else

was needed: a craft radically different from these eastern steamships, a vessel designed for and adapted to the Western Rivers.

. . . . . .

And so Henry Shreve was building his boat in 1816 at Wheeling and all Wheeling was laughing.



CHAPTER V

THE FIRST REAL STEAMBOAT

SHE was the *George Washington*, this boat of Henry Shreve's taking shape at Wheeling. And such shape! The eastern shipbuilders had little faith in it and minced no words in saying so. Even Daniel French, builder of the *Enterprise* and Shreve's former partner, would not concede that this "dismantled frigate," this topheavy tub, could go downstream, let alone upstream.

Her builder had designed a new engine, modelled somewhat on French's oscillating affair but with sweeping changes. Shreve maintained the oscillating principle all right, but he imparted the vibration to the pitman and held the cylinder stationary. David Prentiss had fairly recently invented cam wheels. To these Shreve added his own idea of the cam cut-off, with flues to the boiler—something which resulted in a great saving of fuel.

The *Washington*, in embryo, lay stretched out stark and gaunt on the Wheeling ways—a long, shallow shell. The workmen still were shaping the timbers for her hull: long seasoned timbers, too, taken from Wheeling's old fortification, Fort Henry. She measured one hundred and thirty-six feet in length



From an old print

SUNRISE ON THE LEVEE IN THE HEYDAY OF RIVER STEAMBOATING

and twenty-eight feet in beam. She looked, said the spectators, like an overgrown keelboat. And in sober truth she was nothing more nor less than that.

It is very easy for us, who have the advantage of so many intervening years of experience, to understand why Shreve was building his boat on a keelboat hull. If his intimate acquaintance with these baffling and treacherous rivers had taught him anything at all, it had taught him that a steamship—however valiantly and successfully she might battle the deep waters—was a bulky and helpless affair in the rivers. And his experience had taught him one thing else. The type of hull which could move most easily through the river currents was the keelboat hull. How could he *not* know it from his three years' wearing experience as a keelboat captain?

Therefore it was the most logical and reasonable step in the world for him to take the keelboat hull, attach thereto his specially adopted machinery for steam propulsion, and place before the world the American steamboat.

That is exactly what Henry Shreve was doing, and every steamboat of the thousands which have since plied the rivers, however large or palatial, has been nothing more nor less than that: a steam-propelled keelboat.

His friends and his enemies told him the hull was too shallow to accommodate sufficient machinery to operate the boat. A keelboat hull is almost but not entirely flat. It is unbelievably shallow. From a

model bow and stem, a scarcely-defined keel extends the full length of the craft, serving as a backbone from which to run out the boat's timbers. But save for the timbers that slope and curve under the forecastle and form the bow, the hull is squatty and broad —very slightly rounded. It sits almost flat on the water, but that gracefully sharp model bow is sufficiently keen to cleave the water like a knife and not offer the resistance to current which a flatboat scow bow would offer.

On the other hand, stacking it alongside a ship's hull, a keelboat hull does not send her keel deep enough in the water to retard the boat's progress.

At the remonstrances of the Wheeling people, Shreve merely grinned, said nothing, and went on with his business. And a very few days after the *Washington's* hull had reached the point of practical completion, it appeared that her builder had no intention whatever of installing any machinery in her hold. Instead he floored the hull over entirely. And then—before the eyes of the flabbergasted onlookers, he installed his engines *on deck!*

If there remained in the minds of the Wheeling people any doubt that Henry Shreve had indeed gone mad, that doubt was now completely dispelled. His next step was to place the *Washington's* four boilers and two cylinders in a horizontal position rather than upright. Another unheard of thing! The *Washington* had double high-pressure engines, unconnected, as against the single upright low-pressure machinery

of the eastern ships. And everybody (except Henry Shreve) knew that machinery wouldn't work in that position.

There were other departures from the regular path. In fact, this brazen young Westerner had made so many departures from the accepted procedure of ship-building that there were strong doubts in the minds of those who ought to know as to whether he was building a ship at all! Having utilized his deck for placing his machinery, he boldly added another deck to compensate for room thus taken up, and produced the first two-decker!

The *Washington's* keel was laid down on the tenth of September, 1816. Not until early June of the following year did she glide into the water for a trial trip. Rather it should be said she glided *on* to the water, for that was what she actually did. And the fact that Henry Shreve had built a steam vessel to run *on* the water instead of *in* the water set her apart from every other steam vessel the world had known, and accounted in a large degree for her success and the success of her thousands of lineal descendants.

She slipped from the Wheeling ways easily and without mishap. The placid Ohio received her gently on its capacious bosom and bore her along lightly on the surface. On her first trial trip she moved both up and down stream; and we may assume that this had much to do with the change of heart of the good people of Wheeling toward her young captain. They ceased to laugh. They were all interest now. They

begged Shreve to rename his boat the *Andrew Jackson,* but he refused: he wanted her named for his father's old commander in continental days. They predicted great things for the *Washington* and in this he modestly concurred. When he announced his intention of taking her to New Orleans in defiance of the outrageous claims of Fulton and Livingston, they became his partisans to the last man. Anything to defy the cocksure and arrogant Easterners and free the rivers from the death-grip of the monopoly!

The ladies of the town wove a silken banner to float from the *Washington's* jackstaff. On one side the figure of Fame blew a trumpet. On the other was embroidered, "Our friends shall not take from us what we have wrested from our enemies," which was just another way of saying that neither Fulton, builder of the first steamship, nor Livingston, who had bought the territory from France, should place any embargo on the free use of the rivers they had secured with so great difficulty.

One likes to pause in this restless age, when speed on the ground and in the air is reckoned at more than a hundred miles an hour, and linger over the scene of the departure of the first steamboat.

Here is a people now fully alive to the vast promise of their locality, a land in truth flowing with milk and honey and from whose mountains they could dig iron and brass; a people, well nigh helpless, for all that, because they have no sure and efficient means of transporting their output; a people weary with

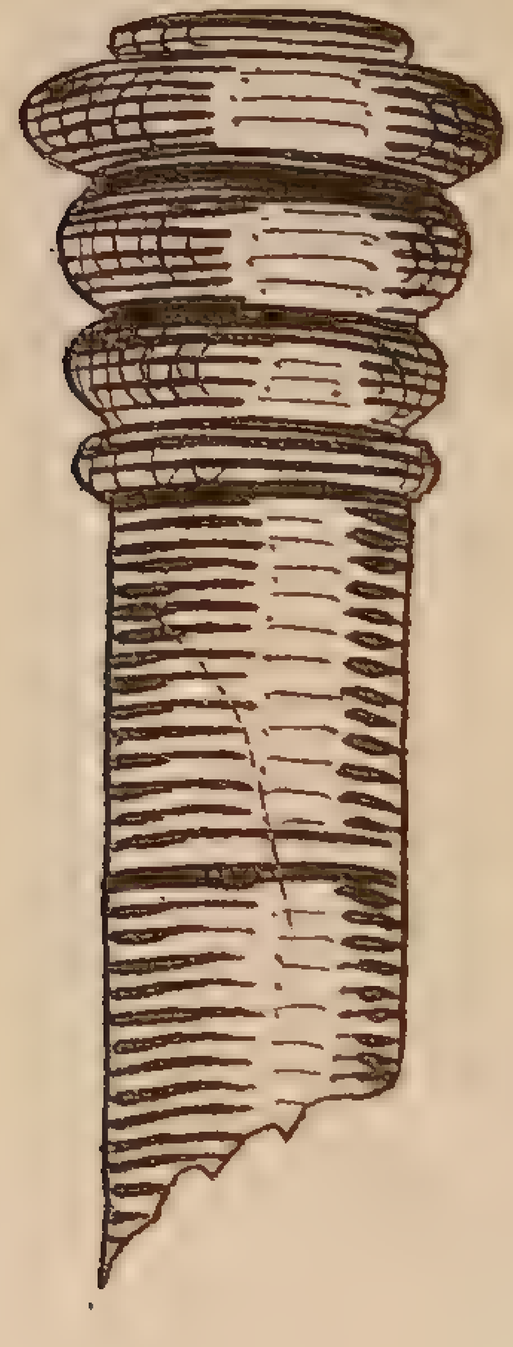
waiting and watching repeated failures at steamship building; a people still hopeful that this ridiculous-looking craft of Henry Shreve's might do the business.

She lies there at the muddy bank of the Ohio, her name bravely lettered on her side. And the town and surrounding country have emptied themselves to witness the start. The *Washington* has two smoke-stacks, placed side by side (like every Western River steamboat since). Her engines are plainly visible slightly abaft the hatchway that leads from the fore-castle (*not* pronounced "fo'castle," if you please, as in deep water terminology) to the upper deck. Her sidewheels are placed rather farther back than were the ordinary sidewheels of a contemporary steamship. Later, in future steamboats, they will be placed farther back yet and for a good reason.

Captain Shreve with a group of strong-hearted passengers stands on the upper deck watching the activities below. He has garnered his crew not from imported "eastern" sailors, but from the barge and keelboat crews he has known these many years. They are familiar with that uncertain and capricious old lady, the Mississippi, and her more placid tributary, the Ohio, from Pittsburgh to the Gulf. Should the *Washington* run into hard luck on her voyage, these hard-muscled bargemen will know how to right matters.

As a signal to start, the pilot in his house atop the upper deck blows a trumpet—keelboat procedure once more. The steamboat coughs, wheezes, and ap-

pears to be blowing her nose. Her sidewheels turn in reverse, the smoke from the chimneys redoubles, the 'scape pipes breathe alternately in great gusty sighs. And she backs away into the mid-Ohio channel, swinging her bow downstream and dauntlessly facing a voyage through the desolate rivers equal in extent to two-thirds of the journey from America to Europe.



CHAPTER VI

THE *WASHINGTON*

"ON Monday evening last," says *Niles Register*, an old gazeteer of 1816, "the steamboat *Washington* sailed from Wheeling, Va., for New Orleans under command of Capt. Henry M. Shreve. She got under way about five o'clock and in forty-five minutes had made about nine miles. . . . She is one hundred and thirty-six feet long. Her main cabin is sixty feet; she has three private rooms besides a commodious barroom. . . . Her steam power is applied upon an entirely new principle, exceedingly light. . . . She has no balance wheel, and her whole engine, possessing the power of one hundred horses, weighs only nine thousand pounds. It is the invention of Captain Shreve."

For years to come the story of steamboating on Western Rivers was to be punctuated at all too frequent intervals with casualties of a greater or less degree of seriousness. Blown-out cylinder heads, bursting boilers, blazing cabins, and a terrific toll of lives was to mark the progress in the development of the steamboat. And at last the government would have to step in and enact regulations governing the construction and operation of steamboat engines.

As if to set the pace for many of her descendants to follow, the *Washington* three days out of Wheeling came in for her share of tragedy. She appears to have loafed along easily, stopping to transact a fair amount of freight and passenger business and to gather wood fuel. On Monday, the seventh of June, she stopped a day just below Marietta, Ohio. On Wednesday her fires were rekindled preparatory to continuing her journey. Some difficulty was experienced in getting the boat in a proper position for starting. She was carried by the force of the current near the Virginia (now West Virginia) shore and she got aground ten miles below Marysville.

While all hands were busy hauling in the lines one of her boilers suddenly let go with a fearful crash and sent a stream of hot water among the crowd of passengers and crew. *Niles'* says the explosion shook the earth for a considerable distance. The cause of the trouble was "the disarrangement of the safety valve which had become immovable in consequence of the accidental slipping of the weight to the extremity of the lever."

Eight people were killed. Captain Shreve was slightly wounded and several of the crew severely.

Those who had watched Henry Shreve building his steamboat at Wheeling, were now very likely ready to chime in with "I told you so." With this unpropitious start to cast a gloom over his plans, with the sight of the eight freshly mounded graves on the bank above the Ohio to remain in his memory for months

to come, he set to work and repaired the boiler. The journey was resumed September 24th.

And from that time on things moved smoothly. No attempt at speeding seems to have been made on this downward voyage. There was plenty of business to be done at the landings—produce to be moved to market and people ready to take passage to New Orleans. Toward the middle of October the first steamboat eased in gently to the levee at the Crescent City.

A very different Crescent City, too, from the battle-mad New Orleans which had welcomed Shreve's approach on the *Enterprise* two years before. The enemy in red coats had long departed from American shores; but, Shreve discovered not more than two hours after docking that other enemies were to be met. Though both Fulton and Livingston were dead, their monopoly lived and their affairs in the South were most ably looked after by Edward Livingston, brother of the late Chancellor, Robert Livingston. Edward Livingston paid a visit to the *Washington* on the first day of her arrival. After a close inspection he is said to have turned suddenly to Captain Shreve and remarked with a wry kind of humor:

"You deserve well at the hands of your country, young man, but we shall be compelled to beat you in the courts if we can."

Shreve in anticipation of this had retained as counsel A. L. Duncan, a prominent lawyer of New Orleans, and on his advice refused to give bail when a

party of the local constabulary unwillingly came to arrest him. On what charge pray? For venturing into the waters controlled by the monopoly.

Feeling seems to have run high in Shreve's favor in the city, for these southern river folk in common with the river people to the northward welcomed any champion who came with an avowed intention of breaking the combine and releasing the rivers to free trade.

Captain Shreve had decided to make a test case of his trip with the *Washington*. Whether the patent Governor Claiborne had given Chancellor Livingston and Robert Fulton was legal, or whether the Mississippi River in its entirety belonged to the people of the Great Valley as they had claimed in their memorial to Congress: that was the question.

And the settling of that question strung itself out for something like two years and was carried to the supreme court of the nation. Chief Justice Marshall, not long before, had held that the State of New York in granting monopolistic use of its rivers to Fulton and Livingston had overshot its powers. For all that, Edward Livingston in New Orleans, assisted by John R. Grymes, a brilliant Virginian now resident in that city (whose chief fame lay in the fact that he had once successfully and cleverly defended LaFitte, the pirate) fought it through to the bitter end. They even made overtures to Shreve.

Would Captain Shreve accept an interest in the

Fulton-Livingston combine and in return go on about his business and forget to push his case?

It appeared that Captain Shreve decidedly would not. He had at heart something more than the accumulating of a fortune for himself: he wanted to free Western River commerce of the death grip of the New Yorkers.

And he did. The courts decided in his favor and the embargo on trade in the rivers ended. In 1819 the New Yorkers did their last mischief, then gave it up as a bad job, and went East again a few years later.

Meanwhile, this law business successfully out of the way, and himself and his boat released on bail, Shreve turned his attention once more to the conquest of the Great River. The *Washington* swung away from the water front at New Orleans on a sunshiny day in March of 1817. Beneath her shallow keel rippled a chocolate flood with no apparent velocity; the swift river lay north of Natchez.

Four days brought her to Natchez under the Hill. So far all had gone well and beyond matters moved with equal swiftness. The steamboat with each succeeding mile was proving her superiority over the steamships.

Where the Fulton ships had dug deep keels in the mud shoals and crossings, the flat-bottomed *Washington* sped along easily on the water's surface. Where the heavy machinery of the ships had pulled their hulls deep down below the surface of the water, the

Washington's boilers and engines (weighing one-twentieth of Fulton's machinery and consuming three-fifths the amount of fuel) offered no hindrance to her upstream movement. Where the single upright steamship engine compelled all ships to describe a circle in order to turn around, the steamboat's double high-pressure unconnected engines at once demonstrated their superiority. For, by reversing one wheel and running the other forward, the steamboat could turn around in her own length. A very necessary advantage, this, in later years when steamboating had spread to the narrow tributaries of the Mississippi.

The *Washington* arrived at Natchez four days out from New Orleans. Ten days out her captain spoke to a brig bound out from Cincinnati to the sea, opposite Cypress Bend. Thirteen days brought her to the mouth of Arkansas River; fifteen days to Memphis; eighteen days to New Madrid; nineteen days to Cairo; twenty-four days to Louisville. At the towns along the way she had done a good business, stopping for a day or two at each. Besides the brig, she had passed a great number of barges and flatboats. She had come fifteen hundred miles in twenty-four days against the current and was none the worse for wear.

It had been solved—the problem of navigating the Mississippi—by a Western River bargeman.

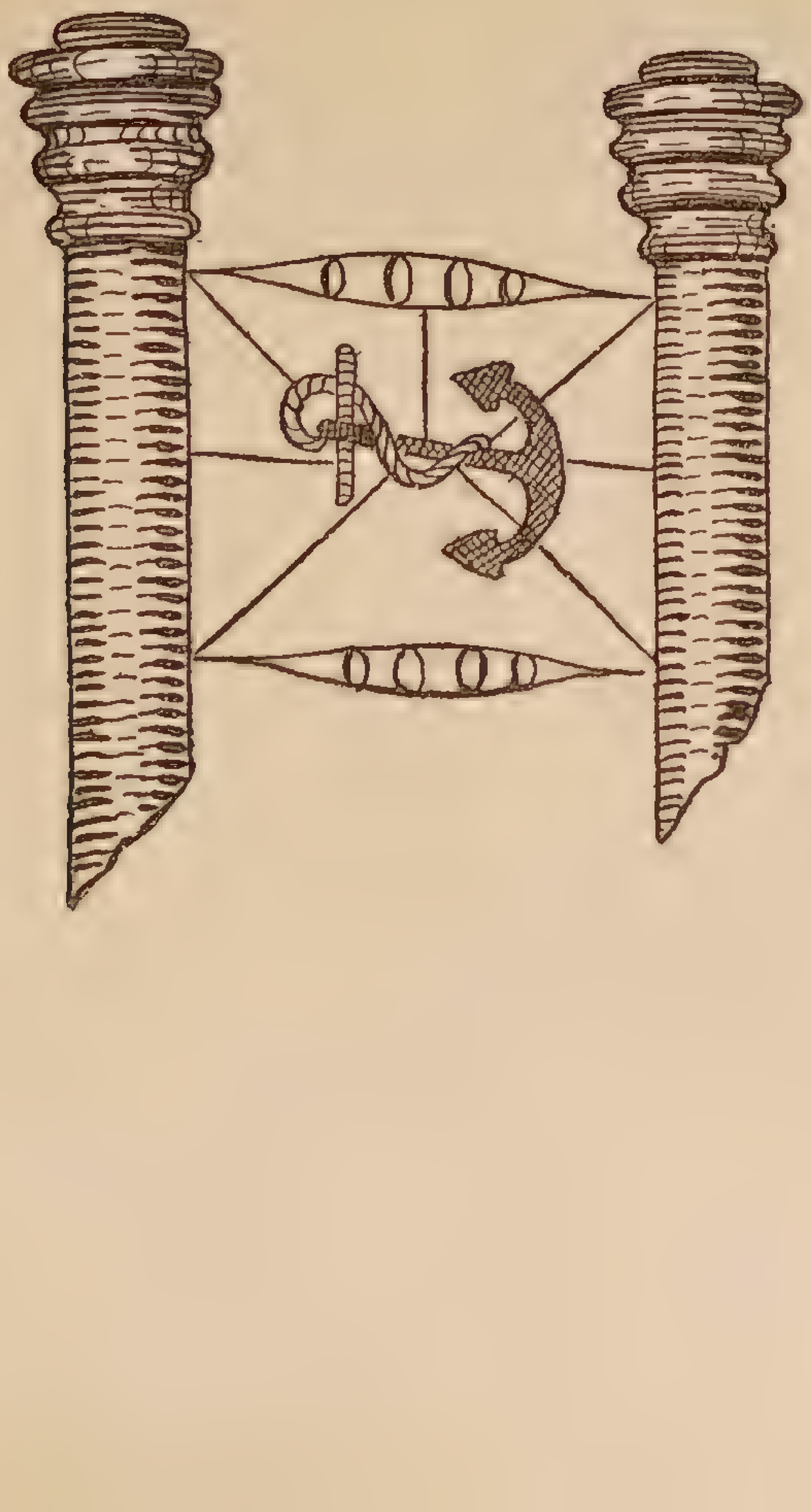
The *Washington* and her commander were all ready to be off again. But first the citizens of Louis-

ville must join in an ovation to Henry Shreve as enthusiastic as any that had ever greeted a triumphant Fulton.

At the banquet tendered him the night of his arrival in Union Hall, the young Captain (he was only thirty-one) predicted—as inventors have a way of predicting—great things for his invention.

"The upstream trip from New Orleans," he said, "will some time be made in as short a time as ten days. We have only just begun."

Whereat it is to be supposed that his fellow banqueters looked polite and said nothing. How was Shreve to know he would live to see the fast *Bostona* in 1851 cut the time to less than six days?



PART TWO

MANY LITTLE BOATS

CHAPTER I

STEAMBOATS OPEN THE WEST

ON a rugged island in the Atlantic situated between Europe and South Africa, a tired and exiled conqueror, shorn of his glory, died in 1821. During his last melancholy years of pacing wearily back and forth over the rocks of St. Helena; of gazing wistfully out to sea where the ships of Britain's hovering fleet kept guard always upon the waters of his enforced residence; of re-living, beyond all doubt, the glory that once had been his; of musing mournfully in the Stone House while waiting for the death that would release him—did not Napoleon dream of the far-off Louisiana he had never seen?

Surely at every memory of his pompous and powdered first consular days at the Tuileries, he recalled Talleyrand and Marbois; and to recall that pair was automatically to think of treaties and intrigue and diplomatic moves *sub rosa*. And to ponder matters of that sort was to bring to one's mind, inevitably and with regret, that offhand bargaining with Robert Livingston, Jefferson's minister, long ago, and the sale of supposedly worthless territory for money with which to win from England victories that had never been realized!

The irony of it, the double irony!

Even as the shadow was closing down upon the lonely house in St. Helena, moves were on foot among certain devoted Gallic societies in America to rescue the quondam emperor and to bring him to a new house all ready for him in New Orleans: a refuge, of all places, in the very territory which he had so ruthlessly and over his solemn promise to Spain sold to the United States!

(They will point out the old Napoleon house to you to-day, as the sightseeing buses in New Orleans lumber out Chartres Street—a massive Creole residence with a cupola atop its roof. And Orleanians are quick always to explain how death arrived at St. Helena in time to frustrate the plans for rescue.)

And the territory itself! It had become the richest valley in the world. A swiftly steaming commerce now moved upon its waters where only a few years before sluggish flatboats went down with the current and a few straggling keelboats managed to come upstream. The steamboat had come to stay. Everybody along the rivers knew that, had known it since Henry Shreve's *Washington* had made her several record trips in 1817.

In the two years immediately following that demonstration sixty steamboats had been built: fifteen at Pittsburgh, several at Brownsville, a dozen at Cincinnati, a number at New Orleans, the rest at points strung out along the upper Ohio and her tributaries.



Louisville and Cincinnati packet *Indiana*. Still in operation under the name of *America*.

Not that the flatboats had entirely disappeared. Far from it. They had increased and multiplied and would continue to do so until 1850. (*En passant*, everything in the Western River country multiplied —families especially. A family of sixteen children was no nine days' wonder. A settler rearing up a healthy ten attracted little more than passing notice. Five, six, and eight children were the order of the day. The Ohio River water was said to be particularly fine for productivity in the family way; and this fact was used in advertisements to induce settlers to come West.) The steamboats had so stimulated business that they could not take care of all of it. Hence much of the freight which was not in a great hurry still moved southward on flatboats. Besides, there were hundreds of isolated settlements back on the tributaries which could accommodate a steamboat only at intervals during the year, when the water was high. Shortly these towns developed the practice of shipping their output by barge to the nearest steamboat landing and there transferring the cargoes and passengers for transport down the river. Steamboats disgorged their cargoes at these same landings to be picked up by some of the few remaining keelboats and poled back to the towns on shallow water.

But once or twice a year (during the period from 1817 to 1835)—in the highwater seasons, when the freshets of Spring had swollen every little rain-water "crick" to river proportions—a chugging, churning, wheezing little steamboat was certain to make at least

one visit to the tributary towns. And that visit, so we may well believe, those of us who were "fotch up" on the Western Rivers, was a thing to be looked forward to for months ahead and to be recalled for months afterwards.

Prosaic and unpicturesque craft they were—these earliest steamboats. The first steamboats were designed merely to take you there and bring you back. Little attempt was made at ornamentation or comfort. Civilization would not for the next dozen years advance to the point where the river travelers demanded "comforts." As for speed: well, twelve miles an hour downstream and six or seven miles upstream was powerfully fast traveling for a people who had been accustomed to make say twenty-five or thirty-five miles a day.

Standing upon the shelving bank of some little inland town far from the main river (either the Ohio or the Mississippi), a little group which in reality is the whole town population stands tiptoe and expectant. Someone has seen a spiral of smoke ascending far downstream around the bend and quickly the news has spread that the steamboat is coming. That boat will bring news of the world, and mail and supplies and the breath of adventure—because every trip was an adventure in those days. Watching down the river, first they see the tops of two mighty smokestacks belching forth black clouds. As the boat approaches nearer the stacks seem to grow larger out of all proportion to the boat. Then the top of the

pilot house. Then the upper decks, the jack staff. Then the full body of the boat with the passengers crowded to the front, the decks piled high with freight to be unloaded. The captain—very likely clad in long coat and top hat—watching austerely from the hurricane roof.

Closer she comes, her little side wheels working together or separately at the will of the pilot, her 'scape pipes roaring, her furnaces ablaze. She noses into the bank—something a steamship could never do on account of its great draft. The deckhands jump off and make fast to a tree or a stake driven in the bank for the purpose. The passengers pour off.

And then what greetings and exchanging of experiences! What accounts of that terribly long voyage from Cincinnati, from Louisville, from Memphis, from—why not?—far-off New Orleans itself!

And we—reading of it in our twentieth century self-sufficiency—must smile when we hear those early boats spoken of as "elegant" craft! That good old word "elegant"! Our grandfathers so overworked it that it died from sheer exhaustion! 'Way back in the keelboat days, posters advertising sailings would always be careful to explain that "no danger need be apprehended from Indians or pirates as the boat's cabin was thickly protected with boards in which there were loopholes and sufficient muskets and ammunition for all on board." But now that the steamboat was here the wording of the advertisements was different.

One, of course, had to pay a little higher for quarters farther aft than those forward. And for a very good reason. When the boat blew up, as it usually did sooner or later, the passengers in the close vicinity of the boilers stood a poorer chance of escaping death than those farther away.

It is impossible to say of those first sixty boats built prior to the end of 1819, how many sank, how many exploded, how many burnt, or how many were snagged. But we can depend upon it that few, if any, died a peaceful and natural death, resting their bones in the scrap heap.

Shreve in a later boat had originated the stateroom idea. Steamboats of the earliest period were partitioned off with a large cabin for men and a slightly smaller one for women, fewer women traveling in those days. Henry Shreve, having an eye to the niceties that mixed company imposed upon the traveling public, cut his cabin up into numerous individual rooms. He later developed the custom of naming each one of these rooms after a state in the union. The largest state, Texas—when it was admitted—gave its name to the largest "stateroom," of course. It was atop the hurricane roof which housed the officers. But that did not come until long afterward; for Texas did not become a state until the late forties and the earlier boats had no cabins atop the hurricane roof. But the individual quarters' idea was originated by Shreve. Possibly that veteran steamboatman, Isaiah Sellers, whose

nom de plume "Mark Twain" Samuel Clemens admittedly stole upon Sellers' death, decided first to call the individual cabins "staterooms." At least it is so claimed by some.

The runs of the earlier boats were, as a matter of course, from Pittsburgh to New Orleans with all the way stops. Or from some one of the other Ohio cities down to the South. New Orleans was still the drawing card. Not until later did the practice of building boats designed for a particular trade begin. Louisville and Cincinnati had the pioneer short line which is still in existence.

That year 1817 had been a marked year for transportation in America. As Shreve was building his *Washington* to revolutionize transportation, the great national highway, a paved road from Washington to Wheeling, was completed. And in that same year Governor Clinton of New York turned the first shovel of earth in his big ditch to be known when completed eight years later as the Erie Canal. And immediately a travel madness which already had poured its virus into the blood of the Westerners spread to the East. Immigration to the West! Excursions to the West! By stage or by wagon or, later, by canal boat to the headwaters of the Ohio, and thence by steamboat southward to purchase cotton or sugar, or to attend Mardi Gras! These became favorite slogans in the Eastern cities.

The East and the West had suddenly been brought a step closer together. Freight moved in ever larger

quantities between the North and South, the East and West. The cities grew. The character of the rural population had changed, the pioneer of the Daniel Boone type having long since given place to sturdy pioneer farmers on the upper rivers, on the lower rivers to equally sturdy landholding "squires" from Old Virginia and the Carolinas, who built plantations and farm houses along the rivers, to be glimpsed from the decks of passing steamboats.

And there were thousands of tons of cotton to be brought out from the awakening South to the awakening North; and thousands of tons of necessities and luxuries to be carried back to planters and farmers on the lower river. "Steamboats, give us more steamboats!" was the cry. Every self-respecting town along the river had its shipyard (as the boat-building river plants are called to this day), and every enterprising business man on the rivers, who could beg or borrow a sum equal to fifteen or twenty thousand dollars or more, built a steamboat, shoved her down the bank into the river, used her—in all likelihood—to convoy his own produce to market and to serve as a common carrier. Soon the profits he made out of his boat induced him to give up his farming or manufacturing altogether and go into the steamboat business. Within five years he could make enough to pay for his boat several times over and to fill his pockets besides. And if in that time she had not suffered the bad luck of exploding her boilers, or running upon a snag in the river, or going up in flames, she was about

ready to head for the scrap heap. Well, what of that? Her owner had money enough to build another boat which he was very likely to do and keep on with his business.

In 1830 the number of steamboats on the Western Rivers had increased to two hundred and fifty. Small, frailly-built, oftentimes of unseasoned timbers, and fitted with engines built by mechanics who had yet to perfect themselves in their trade, the steamboats were nevertheless opening up the West and proving their worth with each succeeding year.



CHAPTER II

FIRST STEPS IN STEAMBOAT-ENGINE BUILDING

HARD were the lessons in steamboat building learned by the river people! They had no precedents to follow; the high-pressure steamboat engine was different from any other engine in the world. In the East had Fulton or any of his successors gone wrong on any point of marine-engine building practice, there were plenty of other shipbuilders to fall back upon. But on the Western Rivers there was only one way to learn to build steamboat engines, and that was to build and use them, and profit by one's mistakes. Engines were tested while the boats plied their regular trades. There was no extended tryout before the steamboat left the shipyards to enter her scheduled course. If her boilers burst—well, that was too bad; passengers and freight shippers paid the penalty as well as the owners.

What the early engineers and engine builders did not know about steam would have filled a barrel. No schools of technical education existed. Not a mother's son of them—save possibly one or two designers of the Fulton and Shreve type—had any theoretical knowledge of steam whatever. They

didn't know what it was all about. One thing indeed they knew: they had a safety valve on their engines with a weight upon it indicating so many pounds pressure of steam. Another things they knew was that the water should be kept at a certain depth in the boilers. But the knowledge really did them little good. For in the excitement of bringing a boat up the river on time or endeavoring to outdistance a rival steamboat, the steamboat engineer had discovered another thing—more's the pity! By the simple expedient of placing a little heavier weight upon the safety valve arm, he could develop a bigger head of steam! . . . And so accidents multiplied.

The first engineers, captains, and mates were imported from the Atlantic seaboard and a touch of the sea remained for a few years in the river traffic. They were seamen of the old school who went about yelling through megaphones as though to be heard over the lashings of the ocean and cursing with foghorn voices when there was no need of it. The nautical phrases and the megaphones soon disappeared but the cussin' remained and may still be heard on any Ohio or Mississippi packet. Not many years elapsed before the places of these seamen were taken by ex-flatboatmen and ex-keelboatmen, who made excellent pilots and captains but knew nothing about steam engines.

This period of hastily knocked together engines was to last until nearly 1838. In that year not a

single one of the steamboats which had set proudly out on the rivers a dozen years previously remained to tell the tale.

The following figures are illuminating: between 1831 and 1833 sixty-six boats went out of commission. Of this number only fifteen died a natural death, winding up at the scrap heap. Of the remaining fifty-one seven were lost in the ice, fifteen fed the flames that resulted from bursting boilers; twenty-four were snagged; five went by the collision route. But immediately they were all replaced by other steamboats.

Accidents became a matter of course. Early steamboat operators charged an accident off nonchalantly to profit and loss, made allowance for the item as they would do nowadays for depreciation and wear and tear. Two or three or four years a boat was expected to last. Good economy demanded a bedrock reduction of expenditures and a saving of money during the brief period of her existence. Result: boats were placed in charge of incompetent men who could be got cheaply. Engines were built with an eye to economy rather than performance. And inexcusable devices were employed to get the business.

Many years were to elapse before the steamboat people would learn a lesson—a lesson which railroad men to-day have tardily grasped and are acting upon—that the utmost service to one's patrons is in the long run the only real economy. Meanwhile the

steamboats were falling into disrepute. Their patronage kept up because there was no other manner of transportation.

David Stephenson, a young English engineer, traveled down from Pittsburgh in the late thirties. As has frequently been the case with English visitors to the American Midlands (witness the late Mr. Dickens and Mrs. Trollope), he found much that did not please him. Particularly the steamboats. He saw thirty-eight of them lined up importantly at the Pittsburgh levee on the day he started south. And he said:

"Economy seems to be the only object with the boat builders. With the exception of the finery in the cabins, little care is expended upon the building of Mississippi steamboats. There are absolutely no regulations for boiler or cylinder construction.

"The cabin of a Mississippi steamboat is strangely contrasted with the scenes of wretchedness on the lower decks, and its splendor serves in some measure to distract the attention of the unthinking inmates from the dangers that lie below. But no one who is at all acquainted with the steam engine can examine the machinery of one of these boats without shuddering at the great risk to which all on board are exposed."

But it was not all criticism. He liked the newfangled individual cabin idea and the way the boats then took water into their boilers by throwing the paddle wheels out of gear and using the power for

pumping. The food he found delicious. He observed that the cabin passage price from Pittsburgh to New Orleans might be a trifle less. The distance is two-thirds that from America to England; the cabin passengers paid fifty dollars. How was he to know that this was a fifty per cent reduction over the price of 1818? For upstream passage to Pittsburgh, Stephenson paid forty dollars.

One could, if one cared to rough it, go deck passage (that is, simple transportation without meals or berth, sleeping in one's own blanket on the lower deck) for eight dollars down the river and five dollars up. And even this small passage price might be cut if one was willing to help the deckhands load cord wood at the various landings—fuel-food for voracious boiler mouths.

Further economies had the early boat builders learned. They had acquired an economy of space that would do honor to a George Pullman. There was a place for everything on the steamboat which would fit in that given space and nowhere else. The tiny staterooms lined the main cabin compactly, opening, each one, out on to the side deck. The cabin itself served alternately as lounging hall, reception room, and dining room, negro servants at mealtimes setting a long parade of tables from one end of the cabin to the other and removing them after the meal was over. The tables were then stored away somehow out of the way so that the least space would be taken up.

But if economy of space was essential in the cabin, it was a positive *sine qua non* on the lower deck. A mate had to be an artist in his line to store his cargo compactly and at the same time preserve the trim of the boat. In constructing a steamboat the builders placed the machinery well forward and the two big sidewheels just back of it. This preserved an excellent balance while the boat was light. But when it came to loading a few hundred tons of freight on the lower deck, that balance was mighty likely to be badly shaken unless the mate who bossed the loading knew his business.

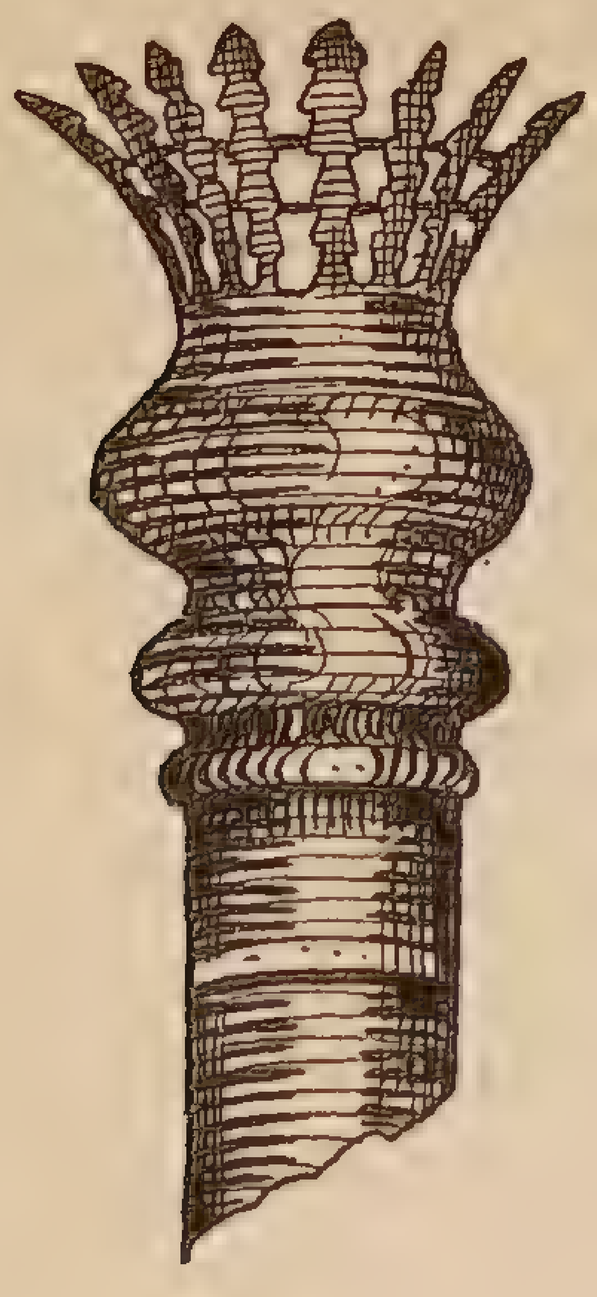
Observe, as a contrast to this utilization of all space, the difference between steam*ship* practice in building and steam*boat* practice in building as shown by the following:

A mighty British passenger steamship, in the forties, was the *Queen of the Orient*, built for the Falmouth-Calcutta trade and operating with auxiliary sails. She was 310 feet long, 31 feet beam, drew 15 feet of water and boasted 16 private rooms. In the same year an everyday little steamboat, the *Yorktown*, was plodding up and down the Mississippi, 182 feet long, with 28-foot paddle wheels, and drawing only four feet of water. She had 40 private staterooms.

Whereupon what must a wise New York journalist do—reading of the launching of the British ship and knowing nothing, nothing at all about the West—but exclaim editorially: "It would really seem that we

as a nation had little interest in this new (*sic*) application of steam power for transportation, and no energy to appropriate it to our use."

Could you find a more perfect example of the superlative provincialism of the New Yorker in those pre-telegraph and pre-railroad days? A provincialism which to this day has not entirely disappeared! How could the poor benighted, isolated Down-Easterner know that at the very time he penned these revealing words, there were nearly three hundred American steamboats on the Western Rivers of his own country, representing a tonnage greater than that of all Great Britain and his own Atlantic Seaboard combined?



CHAPTER III

BOYS, GET THE BUSINESS!

AND the way they did business in those days! There seems to have been little stability or certainty in any department of steamboat activity during the early years. The steamboat schedules, as we read them to-day, seem incredibly flexible, to put it mildly. There would continue to be little dependability until the steamboat owners and operators had learned their hard lessons. The day would come when, on these Western Rivers, great packets—swanlike, luxurious, swift—would arrive and depart with railroad regularity. But in the twenties and thirties that time was still a long way off.

Steamboats posted to leave at eight o'clock in the morning frequently would not leave until late afternoon. A wait of two or three days—until in the opinion of the captain there was sufficient cargo of freight and passengers to warrant a trip—was no unusual thing.

One traveler, hastening from the centre of Louisville to Shippingsport, two miles away, where the steamboats docked, boarded a New Orleans packet marked to leave at eight o'clock. It was rainy and cold and he had run all the way. Eight, nine, ten

o'clock passed. Still the boat roosted easily against the muddy Ohio bank and other passengers came puffing and blowing down from town, each having been told by the captain or agent that the boat would leave in less than an hour.

For three days that boat lay there against the Ohio shore, steam up, loaded, while the captain was still up in town. It finally developed that a part of the engine also was in the city undergoing extensive repairs. And the passengers, kept waiting on board throughout the three days (having paid their good money), could do nothing but fume and fret and swear. Still there was something compensatory in all this: the company had to feed the passengers during the whole time they were on board—which makes one wonder that the steamboats made any money at all. Yet make it they certainly did—what with freight moving at three to five cents a pound!

For all that and regardless of the slipshod methods of building steamboats and doing business, the West grew, people traveled, the cities became, for that time, metropolitan. The demands for boats—the necessary agents for fulfilling the destiny of the Valley people—never for a moment ceased. Still the little steamboats slid into the water; still they blew up, sank, fell to pieces from sheer exhaustion. Before the second decade of the century had closed, the ubiquitous craft had pushed their noses into all the tributaries. The upper Mississippi knew them as far north as St. Paul. St. Louis had ceased to be the mere

trading post which Pierre LaClede and the Chouteaux established, and took on the solidity and permanence which marks a city. The time would come when St. Louis would be to the Upper River what New Orleans was to the lower: the natural terminus of the runs of big boats.

On the Ohio system, the Cumberland back to Nashville, Tennessee; the Kanawha up to Charleston, West Virginia; the Muskingum; the Alleghany and numerous others; all had their regular lines of boats. Steamboats had penetrated the fastnesses of the Missouri River country, had left the main channel of that river and explored the far-off Yellowstone. Then, returning to the main channel they had pushed on to the farthest possible western point of navigation, Fort Benton, Montana, carrying supplies to military outposts strung along the Missouri.

As for the tributaries of the Lower River, the main stem of the Mississippi—Red River, Arkansas River, Ouachita River, Black River, Yazoo River, the innumerable stealthy and beautiful bayous winding their somnolent way through the live oak section of Louisiana—there was not a one which did not have its steamboat connection with the outside world. This same era of the little boats marked the growth of the cotton states. Planters found it an extremely easy matter to raise thousands of bales of cotton, load them on the steamboat which pushed up to their very doors on their own secluded bayou, send it to New Orleans, and become rich off the proceeds.

The first steamboat into the Arkansas River early in the twenties carried a crew of ex-flatboatmen—wild roystering, devil-may-care fellows, hard drinkers, fighters-at-the-drop-of-a-hat and impatient of interference. They ran the boat as they pleased. She was the *Buzzard*—a fitting name apparently, for it is claimed that a bleaker-looking, more sinister, superannuated old tub never plied the rivers. She had run far beyond the few years allotted to steamboats in those days. No insurance company on the Ohio or the Mississippi proper would look at her. Her machinery had to descend to her—fished out from other boats which now lay peacefully on the floor of the river or had been blown to smithereens.

But one easygoing, lazy fellow in Arkansas bought her for a song at a New Orleans auction. He fitted her up to a certain extent, employed the sort of crew above referred to, and advertised with great gusto that "the fast, smooth-sailing packet, *Buzzard*, with splendid accommodations for passengers would sail for Little Rock, Van Buren, and Fort Smith, Arkansas."

She got the business naturally, there being no other boat on the Arkansas River.

She had not been long in the trade before the individual peculiarities of the owner (who lived aboard, fiddling away to amuse himself and the passengers) became manifest. He was deathly afraid of the men he had employed to man his boat and with reason. Well up into the channel of the Arkansas River on

one trip, the engineer set his engine and went up to the bar for a little "smile." The Pilot set the boat in her marks, lashed the wheel amidships, lit his pipe, and strolled off to the cabin for a little poker game with the captain and several of the passengers. The owner sat aft in the cabin as usual, expanding himself and scraping from his fiddle a plaintive Virginia hoedown to the accompaniment of the tapping of his boot.

Left to her own guidance the old *Buzzard* plowed along easily enough until she came to a curve in the river. Then she plunged to the bank, tore through the growth of trees that lined the shore and just as the captain took a jackpot on a bobtail flush, crushed her bow in and knocked a hole in her side as big as a hogshead.

The owner fiddled away unperturbed.

"She's sinking!" shouted an Arkansas traveler, tearing to the rear of the cabin.

"Damned ef thar ain't three foot of water in her hold right now!" yelled another.

Someone touched the owner on his shoulder:

"Did you know your boat was sinking?" he asked ever so gently.

The owner laid down his bow, spat out a river of juice, and replied:

"Suspected something of the kind."

"Why, man, she'll be lost in five minutes!"

"That's nothing, she's been a losing proposition for five months." The owner picked up his bow again.

Another passenger rushed up.

"She's settlin' fast!"

"I wish she would settle with me for what I've lost by her," responded the owner.

"But why don't you speak to the captain; give him some instructions what to do in an emergency?"

"Interfering with *this* crew is a very delicate matter," was all the satisfaction the inquirer got.

The *Buzzard* careened, her smokestacks crashed down, her cabin toppled off into the water. The passengers were drowned. The *Buzzard* was a total loss.

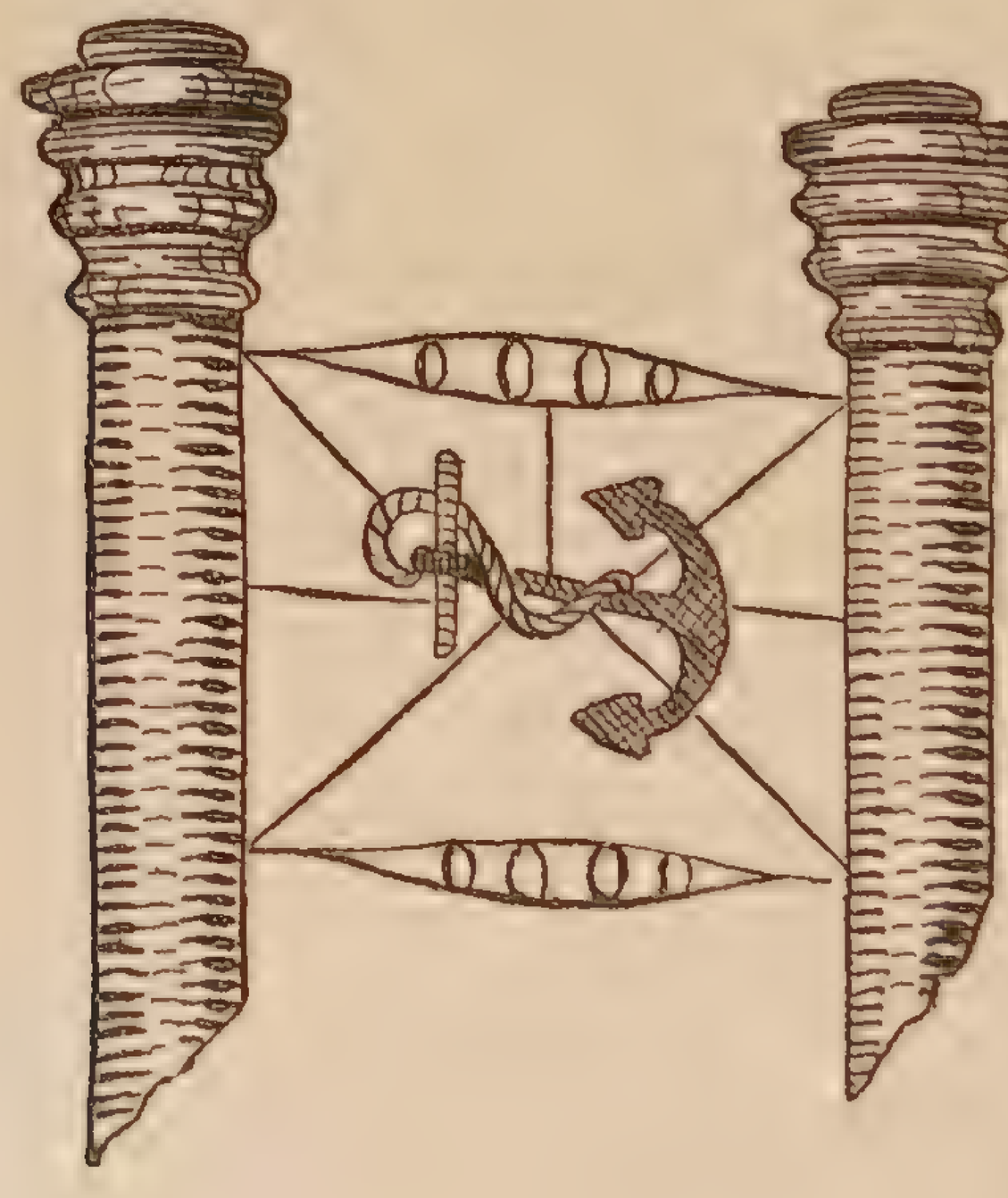
The owner put his fiddle under his arm, took the bow in his teeth, and swam ashore.

I would not go so far as to vouch for the truthfulness of this yarn. It is most likely an exaggeration, but an exaggeration in the right direction. And it indicates the carelessness, the cross-your-fingers-and-go-ahead attitude of the steamboatmen in the days before the formation of steamboat companies. In those earlier days steamboating was a one man affair to a great extent.

The result of it all was inevitable. During the period of the many little boats there grew up in the minds of the traveling public an impression of bad faith on the part of the steamboat owners—which is the opposite of goodwill and whose component parts were fear and distrust. The word of the steamboat owners could not be depended upon. Men who will lie about the time their boats arrive and depart will

lie about other things. So argued the public. Yet, use the steamboats they must.

And so to the tune of bursting boilers and blown out cylinder heads, amid all the uncertainty and distrust that resulted from ignorance and deception—all to be considered at this distance as the birth pangs of the new Midland nation coming into being—the little boats trudged up and down between the North and South. They carried their ever-increasing loads between the easternmost and the westernmost river ports until by 1835, when the first period of steamboating in the West drew toward its end, the frontier of civilization had been pushed far back beyond the Mississippi and towns, cities, farms and plantations dotted a favored land.



PART THREE

GAY AND GALLANT DAYS UPON THE RIVER

CHAPTER I

UNCLE JIM HOWARD

THE oldest shipbuilding plant in the United States is located fifteen hundred miles north of tidewater at Jeffersonville, Indiana, on the Ohio River. In the ninety-odd years of its existence (it has operated continuously and in the hands of one family, the Howards, since 1835) not a single steam*ship* has slid from its ways. It is called a *ship*yard simply because every steamboat-building plant on the rivers is and has been called a shipyard since there were any steamboats.

Old river men say that more than fifty per cent of all the oldtime steamboats built on Western Rivers have been put out by the Howards. Father and son, alternating James Edward Howard and Edward James Howard, for three generations have devoted their lives to supplying river men with steamboats whose reputations have gone round the world—even though the boats themselves have not.

All of the other old shipyards have gone, yielding unwillingly to the pressure of changing times; newer plants have taken their places and are finding good business in the reviving river commerce. Howard is still doing business at the same old stand.

Just the other day the twenty-eight-hundredth vessel built by the Howards (a huge steel barge, in this case, to contain fifty carloads of freight) glided into the river. The first of that twenty-eight hundred was the creation of the first of the Howards to go into the business, away back yonder in the 1820s. He was known, from Pittsburgh to New Orleans, from St. Paul to St. Louis, as Uncle Jim Howard; and he went to his death, fittingly, in a drowning tragedy in the same old river upon whose bosom he had set afloat his hundreds of steamboats. That was in 1873.

This first Howard had come from England with his parents and settled in Cincinnati in the days before that town had its present name. It was known then as Losantiville, a "pedagogical hash of Greek, Latin, and French": *L* for Licking (a little river whose mouth is just across the Ohio from the town), *os* meaning mouth, *anti* meaning opposite; *ville* meaning city. Literally, the name meant, City-opposite-Licking. Young Jim Howard's particular job at the bargebuilding plant of one Hartshorn, to whom he was apprenticed, was to carry to the workmen a cup of grog at each hour on the hour, a hangover of a deep-water custom which had been brought from the East by the shipbuilding fraternity who believed that if they worked an hour without a dram they would die. He must have been quick to catch on. For at eighteen he came down the river with a little gold in his pocket and established a plant at "Jeff" (for so the denizens of that section still dignify

the town of Jeffersonville) and built his first steamboat. Her name is long ago forgotten, but she must have made some sort of success for during the two years following Howard branched out and opened a plant at Madison, Indiana, kept his own plant at Jeffersonville, and built thirty-seven steamboats. This served to *launch* him, as one very well might say, into the steamboat-building game.

Howard's entrance into the profession marks definitely the beginning of the second steamboat era. The first numerous fleet of flimsy steamboats—the little fellows—had served their purpose and gone floating off, doubtless on some placid stream threading the mazes of eternity (for some river men believe that steamboats have souls). It is doubtful that a single one of those shoddy, gaudy, small steamboats remained in 1835 at the beginning of the second steamboat period. From 1835, until the Civil War's tragic beginning in 1861, steamboating would be in the ascendant.

Just five years before James Howard built his first steamboat—in 1829 or thereabouts—a strange contraption known as a "locomotive engine" had clanked uncertainly along the rails in an eastern city, pulling behind it a half dozen renovated stagecoaches full of people. If the echo of that clanking reached the ears of the Western River people, they gave little attention to it. There had been vague talk these past few years, they knew, of using steam to pull cars over in England. But nobody along the rivers paid it any

heed; the fact that steam had proven successful as a motive power on the ground meant little in the lives of the steamboat people who had mastered the natural highways of commerce and were living in a fast and busy age.

It is said of Robert Fulton that when he crossed the Alleghanies with Roosevelt and Livingston, to make the first of his ill-starred attempts at shipbuilding in the West, he remarked to his fellow-passengers:

"The day will come—I may not live to see it—when carriages will be pulled by steam over these mountains at a greater rate of speed than the fastest steam vessel could make."

Nobody seems to have shared his prophetic vision.

Half a century must pass before the river people would come fully to realize that the turning of the first railroad driving wheel doomed the steamboat as they knew it.

Meanwhile a wave of prosperity such as the Westerners had never dreamed of swept the Great Valley. The "flush times" of the thirties and forties, still spoken of in New Orleans as the epoch in which that city bade fair to become America's greatest metropolis, were duplicated to a greater or less degree in every city along the rivers. Pittsburgh had her numerous foundries. Louisville had her distilleries and tobacco warehouses. Cincinnati, now beginning to wear still another name—Porkopolis—had her stockyards and packing houses and was the meat center of the world. Chicago was hardly more than a broad place in the

road. The southern cities, Vicksburg and Natchez and Memphis and the Crescent City, had their huge cotton warehouses and compresses. Running out of, and between, each and all of these cities plied regular lines of steamboats. And on board the boats swarmed a procession of eager-eyed travelers.

They demanded, these travelers, fast learning the *savoir faire* of the effete East, luxuries and comforts which a decade or so ago they had not imagined. The demand was met, as such demands always are met, by those eager and waiting to capitalize upon the opportunities of their times: in this case, by the steamboat builders. Steamboats at once began to reflect this change of attitude in the lines of their architecture, in the ornamentation of their cabins and hulls, in a more stable and dependable machinery, and shortly the old distrust of steamboats and steamboatmen began to melt away.

James Howard seems to have led the way in these improvements; the other shipbuilders followed and a definitely improved type of Mississippi-system steamboat evolved. It was larger, increasing in size from 1835 on, sturdier, and had a beauty all its own. Its first point of distinction, as any river man would have shown you, was the swaggering sheer of the decks. If you will look carefully at a Western River sidewheeler (there are a few of them running now) or a sternwheeler either, for that matter, you will see that while she sits squarely upon an even keel, her main deck, her boiler deck, her hurricane roof, and Texas all fol-

low the same general curve. The bow and stern are high. The centre of the cabin is low. Standing immediately in front of a steamboat I have always got the impression that the upward curve of the boiler deck approximates the curving of a gargantuan upper lip. Later, in post-Civil War days, steamboats were built with such a defined sheer that old steamboatmen say you couldn't see from one end of the cabin to the other! As you walked through these cabins you walked down hill and up again.

Edward Bok, versatile one-time editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, a quarter of a century ago devoted much time and space in his magazine to a criticism of current American home architecture. He was leading a revolt against the architectural monstrosities of the nineties: against the extreme ornateness of decoration which, he oddly deduced, resulted from the hectic over-ornamentation of the Pullman cars of that day. Americans toward the end of the nineteenth century were traveling more than they had ever done before and, seeing the gay and luxurious interiors with which George Pullman fitted the erstwhile commonplace *wagons lit*, they went home—these American travelers—and did likewise: graced their own homes with the utmost in over-ornamentation. One shudders to think of what might have happened to Mr. Bok's peace of mind if he had lived in any part of the steamboat age!

Cabins, railings, cornices of pilot house and Texas and hurricane roof all had their intricately carved

white gingerbread work. Gold leaf was plentiful. Knobs, gilt acorns, the similitude of blossoms, broke out at every conceivable point in the cabin where any such little doodad could be placed. Gaudy pictures, done by very skillful sign painters, depicting home and pastoral scenes, decorated sometimes the paddle boxes, the ceilings of the cabins, the stateroom doors. All decorations tended toward the hectic and the primary colors and possessed nothing of the restraint which to-day marks the most elaborate examples of decoration.

Tops of the heaven-kissing smokestacks had their delicately cut filigree crowns done in the likeness of oak leaves and other insignia. Between the smokestacks was sometimes swung a gilt ornament to correspond with that on the wheel houses, beneath which the two mighty wheels, placed one on either side of the vessel and slightly back, plied steadily and endlessly.

Steamboats first began in this period, about 1840, to be spoken of as "floating palaces"—an overworked description as many thought and with reason. The real floating palaces did not come until after Mark Twain and Mrs. Trollope and Charles Dickens and Eliza Ripley and all the other river explorer-writers had ceased to function. Dickens found the steamboats of the forties ugly, topheavy tubs, looking more like frigates without masts than anything else. Mrs. Trollope complained because the passengers on the floating palaces gorged themselves at table, coughed,

spat, and ate with their knives. Mrs. Eliza Ripley, writing in "Social Life in Old New Orleans"—a fine book, by the way—leaves no doubt in the minds of her readers as to her opinion of the so-called floating palaces of the second period of steamboating. They were hot as hellfire in the summer, there being no electric fans in those days. Mosquitoes and, one cannot help believing, other crawlin' things infested them. The berths were so narrow that Mrs. Ripley (who one gathers was a plump little girl) had a hard time to keep from rolling out at night.

There were no private baths or washrooms. There was a general washroom for the ladies, another for the gentlemen. Mark Twain, who sometimes told the truth about steamboat matters, says there was occasionally a pretty good towel in each stateroom. On all the better boats everything was spotlessly clean, there being any number of deckhands, cabin boys, and chamber maids to keep them so.

One English visitor, Lady Wortley, waxes eloquent over her trip down the Mississippi as she contemplates it in retrospect. And if she seems to deal in superlative and redundancy, let us remember that it was a time when most writers' style resembled somewhat the steamboat decorations of which I have just spoken. She came south from New York by way of Washington, White Sulphur Springs, Charleston, and "the Point" (that is, Point Pleasant at the confluence of the Kanawha and Ohio, an important shipping point). This route from the East was a favorite in

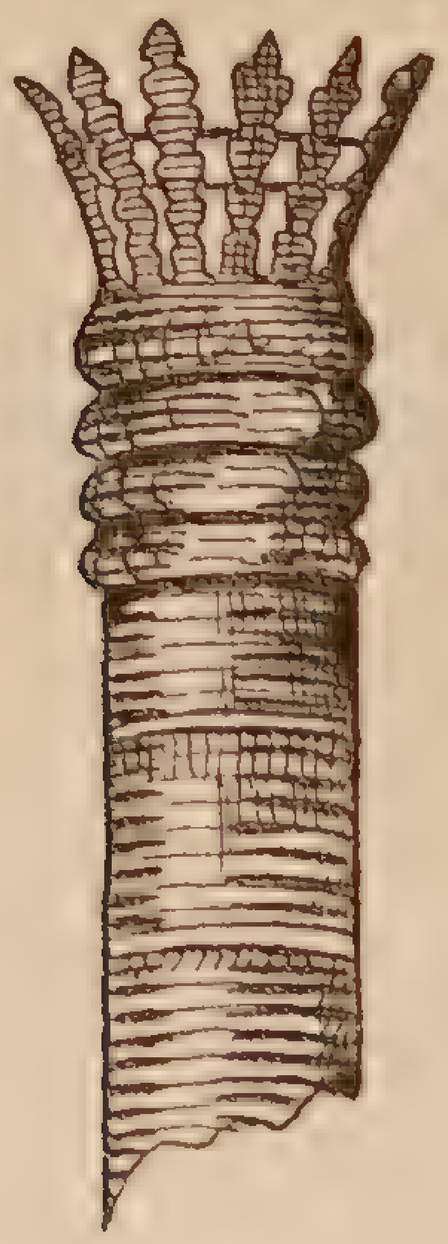
those days, rivaling in importance the famous Erie Canal route and the National Highway. She boarded a steamboat on the Ohio, transferred to a lower river boat at Louisville, and rounded out, some days later, in that lovely upper coast region between Natchez and New Orleans that presages one's approach to the crescent-curving harbor of New Orleans.

"By night," wrote this titled Englishwoman, "the scene is one of startling interest and magical splendor. Hundreds of lights are glancing in different directions from villages and plantations on shore, and from the magnificent floating palaces of steamers that frequently look like mountains of light and flame, so brilliantly are these enormous leviathans illuminated outside and inside. Indeed the spectacle presented is like a dream of enchantment. Imagine steamer after steamer coming, sweeping, sounding, thundering on, blazing with thousands of lights, casting long brilliant reflections on the fast-rolling waters beneath. There are often a number of them like so many comets in Indian file. Some of them are so marvelously and brilliantly lighted that they look like Aladdin's palace on fire (which, in all likelihood, would be in America) sent scurrying and dashing down the stream while perhaps, just then, all else is in darkness around it."

A florid age, a brilliant and unsubstantial age! The migratory waves continued to pour from the East, seeking the West as they had been doing these past three decades. But the West was no longer the

Mississippi Valley; the frontier had been pushed far back. One lap—and a long one—on the journey from the East to the trans-Mississippi country must be covered on board a steamboat. For the steamboat, mark you, settled the West, built up many of the cities and set civilization well on its way before the railroads came.

Had the territory acquired by Jefferson been forced to wait for the railroads, the interest, compounded, on that $15,000,000 Livingston paid for it would have mounted up to such a staggering sum the young United States could not have paid it without going into a receiver's hands!



CHAPTER II

GAMBLERS AND QUALITY FOLK

ON the steamboats one met the wealth, the wit, the culture, the rascality of the land, traveling at the terrific rate of twenty miles an hour. But despite this speed in the matter of getting from place to place, life itself moved to a stately measure, the age was timed to a leisurely beat. You traveled for pleasure in the second steamboat period. You boarded a steamboat for New Orleans at Cincinnati at the foot of Main Street. Just back from the levee swept the town—the town of one- and two- and three-story frame buildings, with an occasional brick thrown in to break the monotony, some of which to-day are tottering out their last days in a pathetic decay along the now almost deserted waterfront.

A mile or more up and down the Ohio shore and the Kentucky shore opposite, lined the steamboats—dozens of steamboats, scores of steamboats. If it was the season of high water you would be boarding, probably, the *General Brown*, the *William French*, the *Ed Shippen*, the fast *Diana* (racer, opponent of the *Baltic*), the *Bell Key*, the *Bostona I*, the *Grace Darling*, the *Peytona*, the *Atlantic*, the *Niagara*, the *R. J. Ward*, the mighty *Eclipse*, one of the longest

steamboats ever built on the rivers, or the *Shotwell*, whom she beat once in a famous race up from New Orleans in 1853.

Should the water be fairly low so that the boats could not get over the falls of the Ohio at Louisville, you would take one of the famous Cincinnati and Louisville Mail Line boats (the oldest steam navigation company in the world still in operation), the *Richmond*, the *Jacob Strader*, the *Ben Franklin* or the *General Pike*, to Louisville. At Louisville, just below the city at a place known as Portland (it is now in the centre of town) were a string of frame taverns, considered fine hotels in those days, at which the crinolined, hoopskirted ladies and bewhiskered gentlemen waited for the Lower River boats to arrive. Here you boarded a New Orleans boat.

Steamboats at the Cincinnati levee! Boats for Pittsburgh and Pomeroy and Marietta, for Alleghany River points, Muskingum River points, Kanawha River points, Cumberland River points. Boats for St. Louis, at which fast-growing town, until fairly recently a fur-trading post, other steamboats left for the Upper Mississippi and Missouri: for the rapidly-settling regions of Minnesota and Iowa on the one river, and the far-flung outposts of the Indian-fighting United States Army on the other.

In this, the second and zenith period of steamboating, you were met always with the elaborate and extravagant courtesy characteristic of those long ago pre-Civil War days. Hurrying down the stone-paved

levee at Cincinnati, in your "hack" or afoot, you found yourself at once accosted by the "runners" (agents) of the different boats whose serried ranks of tall chimneys belched out black smoke there immediately in front of you. Having already purchased your ticket and made your reservation, you were taken in charge by the representative of the boat on which you were to sail and a dozen or more negroes swarmed about you to carry your grips. And as you looked about you it seemed as if every one of the hundreds of other travelers was being met by another dozen niggers.

If you happened to be a woman, the purser or the captain in his plug hat and long tail coat, came out over the forecastle (if indeed he was not posted there waiting to welcome arrivals) to meet you. If you chanced to be young and attractive, or the friend or relative of the owner or the captain, you found yourself taken from your escort and borne in to your stateroom on the arm of the captain himself.

Up the stage plank and over the forecastle amid the hurry and bustle of passengers and of throngs of negroes loading the boat! From the forecastle a flight of stairs that divided into two "branches" half way up, brought you to the boiler deck which, Mark Twain was always careful to point out, was the second story of the boat. Here there would be ample open space—wide at the front end like an open veranda—so that you had room to loaf and could walk easily on your morning constitutional.

On deck, if the weather was at all pleasant, you found the passengers watching, as passengers have ever done, the final preparations for leaving. And since the steamboats nearly always departed at five o'clock in the afternoon or a little later, the chances are that you turned into the cabin about the time the rows of candelabra, swung down the long cabin, were being lighted. And it seemed as though you were looking down a long tunnel of brightness, at the far end and on either side of which mirrors caught the reflection of the garish scene and multiplied it out to infinity; a wide tunnel, a sloping sheering tunnel, set with rows of dinner tables—just now placed there by the servants—covered with the whitest of linen.

The steamboats were more than conveniences for the gambling gentry, for gunmen, and prostitutes—statements of some writers to the contrary notwithstanding. You met, in the course of your voyage (it was called a voyage in the early days), ladies and gentlemen of the first order; men with their wives and families and servants, business men, cotton planters from Mississippi and Louisiana, Creole lawyers and cotton factors, bankers, commission merchants. Money was plentiful.

It was a day of wildcat currency. There being no stable system of issuing government paper, each state, each county, each bank issued its own notes, and naturally many were worthless or, if worth their face value in truth, were not trusted a stone's throw from the bank of their issuance. But one bank of the



THE RICHLY FURNISHED CABIN OF THE "GRAND REPUBLIC"

The Carpet in This Picture Was 300 Feet Long, and Woven in One Piece in Belgium Especially for the Packet

Mississippi Valley, along in the 'Thirties and 'Forties, had established a record for integrity and soundness that resulted in its notes being accepted as exchange in all the marts of the country. Louisville and Cincinnati and Pittsburgh and New York and Philadelphia knew and honored the ten dollar notes issued by the Banque des Citoyens de la Louisianne of New Orleans. The Creole has frequently been pictured, particularly by one George W. Cable, as having little or no business stamina. But it is on record that the notes of this Creole citizens bank of the Crescent City stood out pleasantly in contrast with the notes of other banking houses of that day.

Up the river on the steamboats came the ten dollar notes. For all the steamboatmen when in New Orleans did their banking at the Banque des Citoyens. They were printed, these ten dollar notes, in English on one side and in French on the other for the convenience of both the Creoles and Anglo-Saxons. In large letters on the back of each note was engraved "DIX," the French word for ten. You could see the dix before you saw the note, it was said.

"A dix note is always good," remarked a steamboat mate in Cincinnati, counting his pay money.

"You're right," responded the clerk. "A 'dixie' is bon-bon, as these French fellows say down South."

Unlettered as they were they pronounced the *dix* as it was spelled. The town where the "dixies" came from they called "dixie's land."

"I'm going down the river after dixies," said the

flatboatmen, of whom there were still a goodly number on the rivers as late as 1850.

"I bought this horse down in the dixie country," remarked a traveler on the wharf at Louisville.

As time went on and the sectional homogeneity of the southern people became more manifest, what with the darkening of the war clouds, the term "Dixie's land" came gradually to be applied to the whole section in which the dixies had the largest circulation. From there on, a step only was needed to extend the borders until it embraced all the United States territory south of the Mason Dixon's line.

Daniel Decatur Emmet, an Ohioan by birth, a traveling minstrel and showman by persuasion, made a song about "Dixie, the Land of Cotton." It was said that in his travels under a tent in the North in winter, he longed for the warm southern climate of Dixie land (for which few of us would blame him!) and expressed it in his "walk-around" song beginning:

O I wish I was in de land of cotton
'Simmon seed and sandy bottom, look away! etc.

and set to a rollicking tune in Bryants' minstrel house in New York. Instantly it made a hit and when Emmet took it South in '59, the Southerners seized upon it as their own property—especially those in and around New Orleans. It became the *chanson de guerre* of the gray armies of a few years later. . . .

Poker? Gamblers? Ah, yes.

Possibly the grandest game of poker ever played

on the rivers was that historic one on board the old *Atlantic* of the Lightning Line, coming up from New Orleans in 1858. She was trotting north at a lively gate and was opposite Red Church, eighteen miles above New Orleans, when the pilot answered a hail from the shore. A planter, one Monsieur Jules Devereaux, came on board bound for Cincinnati.

"He had all kinds of money on him," remarked Captain Sylvester Doss, "and bankable paper calling for plenty more. Two slick fellows were on board: Mr. Parker of New York, and a Cuban, Mr. Alberti Gallanti of Havana, as well as a Mr. Carrico, of Montreal. It wasn't long before they had made the acquaintance of Devereaux who proposed to them that they undertake the study of the History of the Four Kings. And that being a pleasant way to pass the time, all agreed.

"In one hour's time the money in sight amounted to $37,255. Gold, every bit of it! And Devereaux was a loser by $650. By noon, each of these gentlemen had a small leather valise containing all his valuables sitting right close beside his chair. And on the table each had about $10,000 in sight. A single hand brought Mr. Parker $8,362. Numerous other hands brought from $2,000 to $4,000, while a $500 or a $1,000 hand was rather a common thing.

"That New Yorker, Parker, was the winner with a king full on jacks. Just as he reached out to gather in his last jack pot, the porter called New Albany, Indiana. They had played all the way up the Mis-

sissippi and two or three days into the Ohio! They had had their meals and drinks brought to them. Including treats for all the passengers, those players spent $791.50 at the bar."

On the steamboats you met opera singers: possibly Jenny Lind herself, for she traveled by steamboat to keep many an American engagement, or the "child *artiste*," Adelina Patti, or our own Moreau Gottschalk, the dark and dreamy-eyed Creole pianist, first of American composers and performers to carry American art into the critical courts of Europe and win renown, all going to or returning from engagements at the old French Opera House in New Orleans, or the opera houses of Cincinnati, New York, or Philadelphia.

Among the commission merchants traveling on steamboats in the early fifties one was likely to run across a gentleman by the name of Stanley, a man of considerable wealth, associated with the firm of Speakes and McReady of Tchoupitoulas Street, New Orleans. Cultivated and influential, educated for the ministry but in later years turned toward the busy marts of trade, he had come from his home in Savannah, Georgia, with his invalid wife, and now lived in a fashionable home on equally fashionable St. Charles Avenue. His business frequently took him from end to end of the Mississippi system and his son, a lad in his late teens, Henry by name, nearly always accompanied him. For this young Henry Stanley was learning the commission merchant business.

A little conversation with Mr. Stanley, possibly on the hurricane roof after dinner, while the southern moon wheeled up in the sky and the dim shores glided past, would develop the fact the boy was adopted, though loved as a son. He had come a few years previous to New Orleans, a castaway from an almshouse in Denbigh, Wales. His real name was John Rollant; but Mr. Stanley had adopted him and given him his own name, Henry M. Stanley. Many years later this same Henry M. Stanley, having had pinned upon his lapel a medal for distinguished service by the knobby hand of Queen Victoria herself, and wearing a title for his discovery of David Livingstone in darkest Africa, wrote an account of his dozen or so years in New Orleans, on the rivers and in the service of the Confederacy and the United States.

A variegated patchwork quilt was the story of Henry M. Stanley. Reading it, one cannot but marvel at the ease with which he slipped the tether of one allegiance and assumed that of another. He landed in New Orleans on a bright spring morning in the early fifties: a ragged, penniless cabin boy just released from the jurisdiction of a cruel mate on an English windjammer. Walking up the levee, as he related it afterwards, he sniffed for the first that peculiar and delicious odor of the Gulf City, a pleasing blending, as it were, of roasting coffee, molasses and whiskey drippings. You may smell it to-day as you walk out Canal Street toward the river—all except the whiskey savor. Pausing in front of a whole-

sale grocery establishment on Tchoupitoulas Street, then the main business thoroughfare, John Rollant addressed a portly gentleman who sat in front of the store reading a morning paper.

"Please, sir, do you want a boy?" John Rollant needed a job the worst way in the world, for he was hungry and tattered. As the explorer recorded it long afterwards, this gentleman, Henry Morton Stanley, happened to be a childless man who wanted above all things a son. Hence the boy's apt question startled him out of his preoccupation and he surveyed John Rollant from head to foot.

"Eh?" he inquired.

"Do you want a boy, sir? I've just landed from England and I've no money and I must work. I'll do anything."

Some talk followed in which the youngster discovered that the gentleman was not, as he had supposed, the proprietor of the store, but was an intimate friend and associate of the owners. He spoke with Mr. Speakes, one of the firm, and John Rollant got the job. He won also the good opinion of Mr. Stanley, was invited frequently to his home, became a favorite of Mrs. Stanley, and in the end was adopted as their son.

By the time this had come about young Stanley was grown to the age when all self-respecting young Southerners were enlisting in the Confederate Army to go north with Beauregard and lick the Yankees. His foster father had made him a business companion

on his travels up and down the rivers, had bought him the best books to read, had introduced him into good society in New Orleans. Had not the War come on just then, it is likely that Henry M. Stanley might have lived out the rest of his days as a young Orleanian of good family and never have gone traipsing over to darkest Africa at the behest of the eccentric James Gordon Bennett to find Livingstone.

But the war *did* come. His good foster father died, following within a few months the passing of the frail wife to whom he and the adopted son had devoted much of their lives. Mr. Stanley's avowed intention to make the erstwhile John Rollant his heir never got down in black and white and the relatives got the money at about the time Henry enlisted. This he did, he says, only after some friends had sent him a woman's skirt to fire his flagging patriotism.

Once in the army, he fought boldly. One wonders if so confirmed a soldier of fortune had any sympathies or patriotic convictions at all. Unless we view the career of Henry M. Stanley purely as that of a soldier of fortune, we cannot escape a feeling of disgust as we read of his behavior in the army.

He was captured at Shiloh and escaped by swimming the Mississippi. He did not return to his command, as he was supposed to do, but got passage to England, saw some relatives, and returned to the United States, landing in New York. He says, in effect:

"Of course, I was now in an embarrassing position

—a southern soldier in the North. I was somewhat at a loss to know what to do in this situation but finally solved the puzzle by enlisting in the Federal navy."

An easy way of ridding oneself of an allegiance! Simply desert and go to the enemy!

Speaking of his life in New Orleans, Stanley said:

"I shall never forget it. It would take centuries to erase from my mind the affection I have for that old southern city that first taught me a boy may grow to be a *man!*"

After the War, Stanley became a roving journalist for Horace Greeley, visiting every country under the sun where any little two-by-four war was in progress. Finally, Bennett gave him the African commission which opened up to him the door to fame and fortune.

. . . And somewhere in the muddy deeps of the Ohio River near the point where the blue Kanawha merges its identity with the larger stream, the remains of the old *Henry M. Stanley* gradually disintegrate under the pressure of the ever-encroaching waters.

CHAPTER III

STEAMBOATS AND POLITICIANS

"WHAT has heretofore been merely the speculation of enthusiasts has been realized," remarked an editorial writer in the St. Louis *Republican* of May 8, 1844. "New Orleans has been brought within four days of travel of St. Louis, in immediate propinquity."

Board the Illinois Central's fast Panama Limited out of St. Louis any afternoon around four o'clock, and you may eat a late breakfast next morning in New Orleans. But in the naïve days of 1844, four days or less between these two important cities—the head and foot respectively of the main stem of the Great River—was *news* for the country at large. The Old *J. M. White* had done it.

Steamboats had early commenced to run on the Upper Mississippi (that is, above the mouth of the Missouri). By 1840 a good and regular trade existed out of St. Louis for the Ohio and Upper and Lower Mississippi points, and for certain points on the Missouri: Council Bluffs, St. Joe, even Kansas City. The bulk of St. Louis' through trade in this era was with New Orleans of course. If there were any unusual runs made by steamboats between these

two cities prior to 1844 there is no record of it. But in that year the most remarkable steamboat of the age put out from the Pittsburgh ways to enter the St. Louis-New Orleans trade. She was the Old *J. M. White*. I call her "Old" *White* in order to distinguish her from that famed and magnificent leviathan of the same name which came many years later.

The fact of the matter is that there were three steamboats by the name of *J. M. White*, of which the Old *White* of 1844 was the second. The first *White* had been built in 1842 at Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. She sank at Grand Chain on the Upper Mississippi the following year. She was named for a prominent merchant of St. Louis. The second *White* (the Old *White*) was built in 1843 and lived a good long life, considering. She was the most astounding thing in the way of a steamboat the people of that time had ever known. She was, for a time, the fastest steam craft in the world.

Her builder, Billy King, who designed her for Captain J. W. Converse of St. Louis, had some peculiar notions about steamboat building, one of which was that the wheels should be placed aft the middle point on each side. Up to that time steamboats had copied the deepwater custom of placing the wheels forward or just amidships (which is farther back than the usual steamship's wheels). But King placed the *White's* wheels about twenty-five feet farther back than any steamboat builder had yet done and maintained his opinion against all comers.

When the Old *White* was launched and settled gracefully on the Ohio's current, King's idea vindicated itself. It was seen that the wheels in the position he had placed them nicely balanced the boat's huge battery of boilers, so that she sat as gracefully as a duck on the water. Then too (and this was the real reason for King's decision), the blades of the wheel, which are known as "buckets," bit into the curving swells from the boat's stem at just the precise point to give her the greatest purchase on the water. Which of course made for speed.

Within a few years every steamboat on the rivers was built with side wheels placed far back of the centre. Upper Mississippi steamboat builders later developed a peculiar type of boat with wheels so far back that they looked almost like sternwheelers. The famous Diamond Jo Line boats were like this.

For her day the *White* was a long steamboat—two hundred and fifty feet. Her beam was only thirty-one feet—a slenderness which accounted in part for her ability to get through the water, though her hold had the unusually great depth of eight and a half feet. Her cylinders were thirty inches in diameter—unconnected of course—and her piston stroke was ten feet.

She left St. Louis on Monday, April 29, 1844, at three in the afternoon. She had six hundred tons of freight on board and a pretty good load of passengers. Three days and sixteen hours later she was in New Orleans, having made her usual number of stops. On

her return trip she stopped at Natchez, Vicksburg, Montgomery, Memphis, and Cairo; and she docked at St. Louis after three days, twenty-three hours and nine minutes. She had thus made the round trip of twenty-four hundred and thirty-six miles in approximately a week. And that was an accomplishment which was not to be bettered for a quarter of a century.

The Old *White* was no racer. At least she never entered a contest. On her record run she had no opponent except Time, but she gave the old boy a run for his money. Five years later the steamboat *Missouri* made the trip in four days and nineteen hours. This was the nearest approach to the Old *White's* time for many moons.

The first of the fine, fast, and famous steamboats had been the *Tecumseh*. So speedy was she that, when she had knocked off the fourteen hundred and eighty-five miles from New Orleans to Louisville in 1828 in eight days and four hours, she held her place at that notch for four years, flying a banner at her jackstaff on which was lettered "Defiance!" Her builders, apparently wishing to make her look more like a ship than an ordinary steamboat, included in her make-up a funny little bowsprit which stuck out from her forecastle like a saucy tongue. She was one hundred and seventy-four feet long, had her wheels exactly amidships (it being before the Old *White's* day), her boilers well forward. Six boilers she had, eighteen feet long and thirty inches in diameter. She

had eighteen inch cylinders and her piston stroke was six feet. Her builders placed her timbers (ribs), which were six by eight inch white oak, six inches apart. Every fourth timber was doubled. Her bottom planking, placed lengthwise, of course, consisted of six inch boards.

Along in the late 'Thirties, however, the *Tuscarora* came up to Louisville in seven days and eighteen hours. Her time, in turn, was bettered by the *General Brown* a few months later. Successively better runs from New Orleans to Louisville were made by the *Empress, Sultana, Ed Shippen, Duke of Orleans, Bostona I, Belle Key, Reindeer*, the *Eclipse*, and the *A. L. Shotwell.*

The *Shotwell's* time was made in a race against an enemy of long standing, the *Eclipse*, one of the longest steamboats ever built in the West. Steamboats were measured in those days according to their capacity rather than their length: a four-thousand-bale boat, if for the cotton trade; a three-thousand-barrel boat if for the sugar coast trade, etc.; or in tons. While the *Eclipse* was a monster in length, measuring three hundred and sixty-five feet, she had a beam of only forty-six feet over all, and her entire depth was only six and a half feet. Hence she was not considered a terrifically large boat as to capacity. But for speed—well!

Her captain and owner, E. T. Sturgeon, had included in her machinery a "doctor"—two doctors, in fact. A doctor, for the benefit of those who had not

the advantage of being raised up on the rivers, is a separate steam engine used to pump water into the boiler: a boilerfeed pump. She had two "freight engines" used for hoisting freight—long before the time, by the way, that eastern ships had such equipment. Her cylinders were thirty inches in diameter and her piston plunged eleven feet at each stroke.

But her wheels! Mighty wheels they were—forty-two feet in diameter. If that conveys nothing to you, just think that a single revolution of those wheels set the old boat forward a little more than one hundred and twenty-five feet.

Her capacity for consuming fuel—what with a battery of sixteen boilers!—is a matter of river comment to this day. One hundred cords of wood every day while running was only a square meal for the *Eclipse*. In May, 1852, she made her fastest run from New Orleans to Louisville in four days and ten hours. But the following year, her rival in many a race, the *Shotwell*, beat her.

The output from the Ohio farms and factories was so great that these large, handsome steamboats in the New Orleans trade were hard put to it, after taking the freight down river, to load up with sufficient freight for ballast, corral their passengers, and slide quickly back to the Falls City on the Ohio for another load.

It seems to have been the habit of the captains of these boats to keep out of each other's way as much as they could; for when they ran the same course at

the same time they just couldn't help racing! Rivalry was so keen as to amount almost to hatred at times. Passengers on one boat would shout to the captain: "Don't you let that other boat beat us, Captain!"

There is a story told of one diffident old lady who traveled on the steamboats only when she had to, because she was afraid they might blow up, as, most certainly, they had a way of doing at rather too frequent intervals. Once a year, however, it was necessary for her to go to the nearest city—Memphis—to dispose of her farm produce in the markets. On one occasion she boarded a big sidewheeler, and had twelve kegs of fine lard stored carefully on the main deck, personally instructing the deckhands to "be careful of these kegs." Then she went to the captain and said to him:

"Now, Captain, I'm going to the city with my produce. I don't want you to do any racing while I'm on your boat. I'm afraid of these fast boats."

The captain assured her that he had no intention whatever of racing. And he proceeded at a very moderate speed up the Mississippi. But towards afternoon on the first day out a rival steamboat caught up with them and gradually drew abreast. The passengers and crew crowded along the rail to watch the other steamboat pulling ahead. The old lady, finally catching the racing fever, walked up to the captain and said:

"It'll be all right with me if you go a little faster. I hate to see that other boat get ahead of us."

"We are going as fast as we can on the fuel we have, madam," responded the captain. The old lady walked away over to the railing. The rival was just drawing a little ahead, her two stageplanks extended like the feelers of a mighty insect, while her crew was jeering and waving. The old lady exploded. Rushing up once more to the captain, she cried:

"There's ten barrels of lard down on the main deck! Take 'em, Captain, and use 'em for fuel! But don't you dare let that other boat beat us!"

One day the *Diana*, under command of Captain E. T. Sturgeon (also one-time owner of the *Eclipse*), and the *Baltic*, commanded by Captain Frank Carter, years later associated with U. S. Mail Line, left New Orleans at precisely the same moment, pulling out from the long row of steamboats nosed in at the levee and standing up the river neck and neck. Between these two existed an acknowledged rivalry which could be wiped out only by an actual demonstration of neck-and-neck superior speed. During the whole of that more than fourteen hundred miles up the winding Mississippi and the placid Ohio, those two steamboats were not out of sight of each other for a single hour: a very different race from that later famous contest between the *Robert E. Lee* and the *Natchez* (of which more later), in which many miles intervened between the two antagonists most of the time.

At times the *Baltic* and *Diana* were within hailing distance of one another, sometimes one in the lead,

sometimes the other. But the *Diana* arrived in Louisville in five days and some hours, slightly ahead of the *Baltic* and was rewarded by a five hundred dollar prize and the right to carry the U. S. mail.

Some river men claim that the *Eclipse* was the fastest steamboat on the Mississippi before or since the Civil War. Many agree that she was the fastest of the pre-war times. The late Captain Sylvester Doss, a Mississippi pilot of considerable note, tells of an astounding run made by this steamboat in the very early fifties.

"She was coming up from New Orleans to Louisville on a beautiful morning in May. The river was at a fair stage, but nothing to brag about. It was daylight, but very early, when the *Eclipse* left Mount Vernon, Indiana, took sixty cords of wood at West Franklin, sixty miles below Evansville, made her regular stops at Owensboro and Rockport, took coal at Cannelton and another six hundred bushels above that town; touched at Oil Creek, and tied up at Portland (Louisville) that evening. Moss Irwin was her mate and he was at home in New Albany, after he had put off seventy-five tons of freight, eating supper with his family when it grew dark! That was real running! Two hundred and forty miles upstream in daylight."

Once in a while as you traveled on the Western Rivers you came across a steamboat with a single engine, but only rarely. The down-east engine does not associate well with a Western River hull. One

such steamboat of a number that ran in pre-war days was the *Saladin*, a famous and successful craft much in demand by politicians traveling back and forth between the cities. It was the *Saladin* which brought General Zachary Taylor from his Mississippi plantation up the river to take the stage for Washington for his inauguration as President. It is said he did not sleep well on board because the *Saladin's* exhaust could be heard for a matter of ten miles on a still night!

And speaking of politics on the steamboats. . . . The boats were incomparable mediums for aspiring politicians. Politics was not merely a source of heated conversation by the gentlemen on the steamboats in those days, as it is to a lesser degree in the Pullman smoking rooms to-day. It was a matter of profession, of vocation, as well.

On many steamboats up and down the rivers, main and tributary, professional politicians, stump speakers, and 'lectioneerers traveled regularly. At the landings while the boat was loading and unloading, the assembled throngs on the bank (for throngs always assembled when the steamboat came) listened with avidity to the enconiums and platitudes, the crudite oratory, the forensic fury of the would-be senators, governors, or (why not?) presidents?

I have told in an early chapter of this book my own experience at the age of two as a stump speaker for the late Mr. Bryan, on top of a piano on board the *Henry M. Stanley*. I came by the gift naturally.

My grandfather ran for Congress in the early fifties on the Whig ticket against General Albert G. Jenkins, his democratic opponent in a section of Virginia (now West Virginia) which usually went democratic. Some years later the two were in the service of the Confederacy and had time to talk things over calmly.

My grandsire made many of his speeches from the forward decks and forecastles and stageplanks of steamboats on the Ohio where that placid stream curves down between Ohio and Virginia. On one trip a number of Ohio and Virginia politicians were on board. As the steamboat touched alternately at the Ohio and Virginia shores, the candidates for office in whichever state it happened to be would come from the cabin, make their talks, dispense the whiskey and cigars—if the boat stopped long enough—and a good time would be had by all.

There was no lack of things to eat or drink.

At one small landing grandfather left the cabin and the congenial and convivial spirits within and, as the stageplank landed softly on the bank, bowed to the assembled crowd with a stately graciousness for which he was famed. He lit into his subject for all he was worth. After paying the usual respects to the flag, to Virginia women, to Washington, Hamilton, Randolph of Roanoke, he turned his attention to his opponents in a rich and colorful vocabulary and pointed out the manifest weaknesses in all their arguments. The fellows on the other side were not fit to hold office! But the Whigs offered to the voters all

that is best! Send the Whigs to office again and never would a deaf ear be turned to even the smallest of their petitions!

"And now, gentlemen!" concluded my grandfather with the consciousness of duty well performed, "Tell me! Am I on the right side?"

Whereat some wag in the crowds on the bank answered quick as a flash:

"Hell, yes! You're on the right side of the question but the wrong side of the river!"

Grandfather lost the election.



CHAPTER IV

HIGH TIDE OF STEAMBOATING

THE second period of steamboating began before there were a dozen miles of operating railroad in the Mississippi Valley. It ended in 1860 with the single track of the Illinois Central cutting in almost an air line down across the state to tap the huge river trade at Cairo, to divert as much as possible of that trade to Chicago and from there by rail to other northern cities. The Illinois Central went further. By a contract agreement with a line of fine steamboats known as the Railroad Line (so-called because of this very rail connection) the railroad carried the mail and transferred it to the steamboats; the steamboats in turn carried the mail and transferred it to the railroads—at Cairo. This plan was consummated for the Illinois Central in 1856, under the able administration of its young and handsome Vice-President, a graduate of West Point, an experienced engineer, by the name of George B. McClellan, later to win fame as a great military organizer—in 1862, the year he did not capture Richmond. In return for the tri-weekly transportation of mail on the swift packets of the Railroad Line and the swift trains of the Illinois Central, the government laid down annually a

sum that varied from $250,000 to $350,000. The Ohio and Mississippi Railroad, now the Baltimore and Ohio, between St. Louis and Cincinnati made a similar arrangement with the Railroad Line to take and receive mail at St. Louis. The line, in addition, did a lively passenger and freight business.

Ten handsome steamboats ran on the Railroad Line, each owned individually and tied together not by any joint stock ownership but by an agreement between their owners. The names of these boats have become familiar in river history: the *Imperial*, belonging to the distinguished Captain E. W. Gould, for years a river magnate and writer and editor; the *New Falls City*, Captain Montgomery, later to win laurels as a commodore in the Confederate river navy; Captain Kountz's *City of Memphis;* Captain Rogers' *James E. Woodruff*, the first steam vessel in the world to publish a daily newspaper on board—to which fact the attention of down-east steamship operators is called. It was edited and printed on a hand press by G. W. Ford, the clerk. And there was the *Pennsylvania*, commanded by the genial Captain Klinefelter, Mark Twain's old boss; the *A. T. Lacy*, Captain Rodney; the *New Uncle Sam*, Captain Vandusen; the *J. C. Swann*, Captain Jones; Captain Switzer's *Alex Scott*, in whose ornate pilot house this same Mr. Twain brought down upon his head the wrath of Horace Bixby because of his (Mark's) dumbness in the matter of piloting.

And they do say—venerable river pilots out there

on the Western Waters—that to his dying day Mark Twain never *did* learn anything worth while about steamboating! But, they admit, he was a first class writer!

There were a thousand and one prophecies of failure when this rail-river arrangement was made. Steamboats and railroads could never operate harmoniously together! Yet the plan did work and worked admirably (and it will work admirably again in 1929!) until the War and its subsequent manifold changes brought an end to pre-war steamboating just at its height.

Besides the two railroads in the Mississippi Valley —the Illinois Central and the Ohio and Mississippi— there were built in the fifties a number of little jerkwater rail lines running from the main stem of the river back into the inland towns and to farms and plantations which supplied the steamboats with the bulk of their traffic. Feeders they were for the steamboats, purely and simply. It is unlikely that anyone anticipated the time—not so many years distant—when the steamboats would have become mere feeders for the railroads.

Out of Louisville, the falls city of the Ohio, ran the redoubtable Lightning Line which in the late forties and early fifties established a reputation for regularity, comfort, speed—and cuisine: The *Robert J. Ward,* the oft-mentioned *Diana* and *Baltic* (whose historic race Currier and Ives immortalized in a sensational print which looked nothing like the original);

the *John Raine*, the *Anteloupe*, the *Pacific*, the *Fanny Bullitt*, the *E. H. Fairchild*.

Cincinnati, growing weary of the practice of having to transfer all her passengers and freight (except in the season of very high water) at Louisville on account of the falls, established her own line of newly-designed "short boats" which could by a narrow margin squeeze through the canal recently built around the falls and so head on straight for the South. This company called itself the Cincinnati and New Orleans Express Line, and though its boats lacked something in length and speed, they yielded place to none in the matter of accommodations, regularity, and fine food. The promptness and reliability of the service made them a marked improvement over any of the numerous individual boats in the same trade. They coined money. They bade fair to be a permanent institution. But again, the War. . . . The War came like a blight upon the horizon of a happy and prosperous people and halted their progress.

Many a business man, in this year of grace 1929, taking a night trip from Cincinnati to Louisville or return, travels by river on the boats of the Louisville and Cincinnati Packet Company. This company is the same as the old United States Mail Line, the granddaddy of all the steamboat companies, still in existence after a hundred and ten years. Your business man travels by river because he can board the *Queen City* with her graceful sloping cabin and sturdy lines, or the big three-decker *Cincimnati*, and be as-

sured of a good night's rest on the bosom of the Ohio, of a good supper and breakfast, and can be in Louisville or Cincinnati—whichever city he is bound for—early enough the next morning to transact business. All for the price of what would be about equivalent to railroad fare alone. Once, this same company sent its big steamboats flying to Memphis and New Orleans, to Pittsburgh and St. Louis, and up the Kanawha River. Once there were eighteen fine steamboats in the line under the charge of the sole remaining commodore of all the steamboat owners who functioned in the old days—Captain Frederick Laidley of Covington, Ky.

Strader and Gorman organized the U. S. Mail Line. In 1818 they began operations with the *General Pike*, the first steamboat designed exclusively for the transportation of passengers. She started to work in 1818 and when she went to the scrap heap a few years later she was succeeded by a long procession of steamboats named successively and variously *Pikes*, *Zebulon M. Pikes*, *General Pikes*, *Franklins*, and *Ben Franklins*. The Mail Line operated daily steamboats to St. Louis, as early as 1847. Three times a week boats left for Memphis; but, what with the growing in importance of Memphis as a cotton shipping centre, the demands of the traveling public and freight shippers caused the company to install a daily line to Memphis five years later.

The opening of the fifties found a still larger fleet operating in the service of the Mail Line—the *Jacob*

Strader, a long greyhound of a boat with "low pressure" machinery (so advertised to assuage the fears of those who were still a little leery of the high pressure engine of that date), the *Moses McClellan*, the *Fashion*, the *Alvin Adams*, the *Northerner*, the *Southerner*, the *High Flyer*, the *Cape Catterlin*, the *Telegraph III*, and so on and so on.

There were a number of steamers named *Telegraph*. That word seems to have taken hold on the fancy of the public because of Morse's then recent invention, and at least four steamboats bore the name. Two of them were lean and lanky, as swift as whippets—*Telegraph II* and *Telegraph III*. The *Telegraph III* in 1850 made a fast run from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh in one day and seventeen hours. *Telegraph II* made a short run from Louisville up to Cincinnati in 1853 in nine hours and fifty-two minutes—a record indeed for those days which no boat was able to better until the *City of Louisville*, of the Mail Line fleet, as were also the *Telegraphs*, made the same run in 1894 in nearly an hour less.

It is said that Stephen Foster's song "Oh, Susanna!" referred in the second or third verse to the first steamboat *Telegraph*:

I jumped abode de *Telegraph*
And trabble down de river
De 'lectric fluid magnified
And killed ten thousand nigger!
De bullgine bus', de hoss run off,
I thought I'd sho'ly die

I shut my eyes to hol' my breff,
Susanna, doan you cry!

Another daily steamboat line ran out of Louisville for Wheeling to connect there with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. It operated daily boats and was known as the Union Packet Company.

Pittsburgh had her lines of steamboats—Pittsburgh, builder of the first ships, the first barges, and many of the earlier steamboats! Once, in a long forgotten era of America's transportation history, before the first steamboat had ever kicked up the Ohio's waters, full rigged barques, sloops, and brigs had been launched at Pittsburgh and had sailed down the rivers out through the Gulf, and away to the seven seas. For that was Midland America's way of avoiding payment of duties for the transfer of incoming and outgoing products at *Spanish* New Orleans. The three larger packet lines operating in the fifties out of Pittsburgh connected daily with the railroads at Brownsville, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. These Pittsburgh boats were built to draw an unbelievably small amount of water. Dry weather in the upper Ohio region in those times, before the first of the splendid series of locks and dams now nearing completion had been installed, were days to try the souls of even the most skillful pilots and boat owners. Getting your steamboat stuck on a sand bar or a mud shoal is an expensive matter and so the steamboats running out of Pittsburgh drew usually only about four feet of water!

But the steamboats that ran in organized "lines" or companies composed only a comparatively small portion of the thousands that operated on the rivers. Hundreds of individually-owned and -operated steamboats plied in and out of every river port on the main river and on the tributaries, large and small. A popular boat, a popular captain, a popular clerk, a popular mate, an exceptional cuisine—any or all these items was enough in those easy going times to cause a traveler to wait over a day or two until his favorite steamboat came along. Likewise, a shipper with a consignment of freight to go by boat would hold it on the levee until his favorite boat came by to pick it up, refusing to let earlier boats move it.

There are tales rife along the rivers of those days of doing business on a basis of favoritism. Nor was it all on one side. Many a steamboat captain who enjoyed a good trade and always carried a large number of passengers on board passed by the piles of freight he might otherwise have had. The steamboatmen undoubtedly held the upper hand; they could afford to be choosey in those days. Later they sang a different song.

Meanwhile in the South, in the far South, New Orleans and Memphis controlled a mighty cotton trade. Carrying cotton demands a particular type of steamboat, built with extremely wide guards held up by hog chains, on which bales of cotton can be loaded and still leave room for passengers and other freight. The Howards and the old Cincinnati Marine

Ways and the New Albany and Pittsburgh and Madison steamboat builders had long before commenced to design steamboats for the cotton trade. In 1812, five million pounds was the South's total output of cotton. In 1845 Tennessee, Louisiana, and Mississippi alone exported by steamboat five hundred million pounds. The steamboat tonnage of the Mississippi Valley, exclusive of New Orleans, in the middle 'Forties exceeded that of the Atlantic seaboard by fifteen thousand tons. The steamboat tonnage of New Orleans alone was twice that of New York.

"The position of New Orleans," Jefferson wrote, "certainly destines it to be the greatest city the world has ever seen." He excepted neither Rome nor London, Babylon nor New York. And, viewing the panorama of American civilization from his time, there was good reason to believe that. Was not New Orleans located at the most strategical point on the continent? Did she not control the trade of the rivers which drained the whole mighty territory between the Alleghanies and the Rockies? And were not the Westerners solving the problem of transportation by successfully navigating the entire system with steamboats? More than that: located as she was at the entrance from the Gulf to the Midlands, New Orleans was the logical port of shipment and entry for the entire new nation. Not only must the whole of the Midwest and West depend upon the Crescent City for its needed imports: the Atlantic ports of the United States, the foreign ports of the world, could have the

enormous bulk of exports from the Great Valley only through her portals.

But even man's most sanguine predictions are based upon contingencies. The West's victory over the river currents and the assumption that the rivers were the only route between East and West, were the fallacies upon which Jefferson based his statements. Changes were to come which would prove his prediction futile.

The first step in the direction of reclaiming American trade supremacy for the East had come when New York built its Erie Canal in 1825. Not alone was that route constructed as a feeder for steamboat traffic on the Great River. It was a definite move to take from New Orleans the commerce of the Valley bound for the Atlantic seaboard, and to shorten the route east by the matter of a couple of thousand miles. The railroads eventually completed what the canal had begun. But in the interim New Orleans was spreading herself like the Green Bay Tree.

Out of the Tennessee River in a single year came one hundred and eight thousand bales of cotton and fifteen thousand hogsheads of tobacco by steamboat. The Cumberland River sent its quota of one hundred and twenty thousand bales and twelve thousand hogsheads. From the central market at Memphis three hundred and twenty-five thousand bales of cotton moved in a single season to New Orleans. The Ouachita River and its tributaries, up which Captain Cooley's boat still tranquilly plies its weekly way

from New Orleans, sent one hundred and fifty thousand bales. The Red River's output was two hundred and fifty thousand bales and the Arkansas's one hundred and twenty-five thousand bales. All sent to swell the Crescent City's river business.

All accounts of progress in transportation in the middle West halt at the year 1861, the year of cataclysm, the year of the embargo on the rivers, the year of the beginning of the end so far as old-time steamboating was concerned. War and its manifold dread accompaniments descended like a fog over the valley of the Great River. With the nation split into two warring sections whose east-and-west line of demarcation bisected the Mississippi River just below Cairo at the mouth of the Ohio, one of the resulting misfortunes was that all traffic ceased at that point. The Ohio and the Upper Mississippi were in Northern hands; the Lower River in Southern hands. President Lincoln blockaded the southern ports on the Atlantic. President Davis blockaded the Mississippi River and held it as long as the inadequate resources of the Southerners held out. That lasted until the combined fleets of Farragut, Ellet, Davis, and Porter had sailed up the rivers and down the rivers and captured New Orleans and the other river cities and reopened to a certain degree the traffic which had been halted in the year of the beginning of the war.

But no adequate through trade service could be maintained while contending armies along the Lower

River alternately seized, burned, impressed, confiscated. In Southern territory (such sectors of the river as remained in Confederate hands) there was continued service from port to port within those confines. For hauling government supplies and carrying Southern troops the steamboatmen were well paid—but in Confederate money, which soon began to decline in value. In the North things went for a while a little better. A definite trade remained to the steamboats between the river ports in the Federal hands. And later in the war steamboat captains grew wealthy in transporting Yankee troops and supplies in return for Yankee gold.

The steamboats on the Lower River took refuge up the tributaries—up the Red, up the Yazoo, over in the Bayous. By the dozens they were sunk, by the dozens they were burned, by the dozens they rotted and fell to pieces. And when the end came the glorious fabric of Mississippi steamboating, which had been the wonder of the nation a few years before, was gone.

Wars have a detestable way of coming just at the wrong time. So must have thought the steamboat interests and the people of New Orleans. For the end of New Orleans' supremacy as the greatest port of America and the end of old-time steamboating are identical, although for years previous, as has been indicated, Orleanians had realized that they were being outdistanced in the North and East. The war clouds settled down over the Crescent City at the

height of her glory, no longer as a competitor of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, but as the greatest city in the South and West—unique, individual, wealthy. Two thousand steamboats plied the rivers. There were four thousand steamboat arrivals at New Orleans in that mad, glad year of 1859-1860. Her levees were lined with steamboats bringing from the North and the roundabout plantations a tribute to her greatness. Her marts ran with gold. Her lower wharves swarmed with sail and low-funnel steamers from all parts of the globe. Her river trade alone for the year was greater than $289,000,000; her ocean commerce more than $183,000,000.



PART FOUR

THE BATTLE OF THE BOATS

CHAPTER I

THE BATTLE OF THE BOATS

AT New Albany, Indiana, on the Ohio River, five and a half miles below Louisville, Charles Ellet reviewed his fleet—the fleet with which he intended to clear the Mississippi of all Confederate war craft. There they lay before him—nine vessels in all, some lying in close to the muddy bank, some just rounding to in mid-channel at the end of their downstream voyage from Pittsburgh: three sternwheel towboats, the *Lioness,* the *Sampson,* the *Mingo;* two large sidewheel Cincinnati packets, the *Queen of the West* and the *Monarch;* a small sidewheel packet, the *Lancaster;* the *Switzerland,* a sternwheeler; and two small tenders.

They rested on the placid bosom of the Ohio—as strange a flotilla surely as ever set out from any port to meet and conquer an enemy—manned by civilian crews, under the charge of a civilian engineer who had never yet smelt powder in battle but who was, for all that, putting his powers as an internationally-known engineer to use in the service of his country along lines in which, in his opinion, he could render the best service.

It was the twenty-fifth of April, 1862, and Charles

Ellet, standing there on the Ohio ways as his fleet passed before him and re-reading an official telegram in his hand, was well content. At last he had his fleet of rams! To the casual eye his steamboats looked rather like all the other steamboats that moved on the western waters in those days. A naval officer would have laughed at the idea of fighting with these river boats. They reared their wooden decks and tall black chimneys skyward, belching forth black smoke. Their pilot houses, however, had been built around with heavy timbers. So had their machinery. Bulkheads had been added. Under the flooring of their lower decks heavy braces had been placed longitudinally and laterally; and Ellet, carrying the fore-and-aft timbers forward to a sharp beak which extended out beyond the stem of each, had provided every one of his vessels with a weapon which he believed would prove irresistible—provided he was not too late on the scene of action with his fleet.

The importance of the Great River, bisecting the country north and south, had become immediately and terribly apparent to both the warring factions as soon as the call-to-arms had been sounded. Lincoln, having early grasped the fact that he could subdue the Southerners only by cutting off their supplies, had established a blockade of the Confederate Atlantic ports. Now, if he could only carry that blockade through the Gulf of Mexico into the Mississippi, push his Yankee ships northward and blockade the river ports, operating meanwhile with the Federal

land forces, he would have practically all the Confederacy hemmed in, and in time the South must fall before the Federal arms. The Mississippi was as necessary to their success, many Northerners believed, as the conquest of Lee's hitherto invincible Army of Northern Virginia.

But the Confederates had got to the river first; and from their northern frontier—the Kentucky-Tennessee line—the river now lay strongly protected by a string of forts placed strategically along both shores from Fort Pillow at the north to Fort St. Philip, below New Orleans, at the south. And in order to work in conjunction with the fortifications in opposing the vessels which the Southerners knew would be sent against them, the government at Richmond sent Captain Hollins, a sturdy old-line naval officer of wide experience, to New Orleans to fit out a fleet and set off up the river to meet the Federal gunboats under Flag Officer Foote when they came out from the St. Louis shipyards. But Hollins, having got together a nondescript fleet of every sort of vessel he could corral in the environs of the mouth of the Mississippi and having set off up the river according to orders, was ordered back to Richmond to help the Confederate general in command there.

From the Southerners' viewpoint a bad piece of business this was! President Davis' high-minded blundering nowhere manifested itself more strikingly than when he had given so important a port as New Orleans only seven thousand men to face Farragut's

huge fleet coming around the Florida cape from the Atlantic to attack the city.

But to return to Ellet. The Confederates, he knew, had now marshalled at New Orleans a strong River Defense Fleet, which was even now moving up against the current toward the Ohio's mouth. Two at least of the vessels in this Confederate fleet were rams, Ellet further knew, and under command of a seasoned steamboat pilot, Commodore Montgomery, once a friend of Mark Twain.

Now the steam ram in modern times was Ellet's own idea—a revival of the ancient method of fighting employed by triremes and biremes in Roman, Greek, and Egyptian days: crude, primitive, rather ungainly for modern warfare, but quick, decisive and telling upon the enemy, and revived for the first time in a thousand years by this civilian engineer.

"I would not depend upon the steam rams for any sustained effort at fighting," he had said over and over. "I should rely upon the quickness and suddenness of their assault upon the rebel craft. Their prows, I believe, will run through the strongest vessels the enemy can muster. I have provided means for the men to escape and leave the rams to their fate, once they have accomplished their one purpose."

In vain had he been urging the United States government these last ten years to adopt the ram principle and make it a part of the national naval program. But in return for his suggestion he had merely



"THE CITY OF LOUISVILLE," CRUSHED IN THE ICE AT CINCINNATI

This Packet, Which Went Down in February, 1918, Was the Last of the Old Ohio River Sidewheelers



THE FAMOUS OLD SIDEWHEELER "SULTANA" LOADED WITH FEDERAL SOLDIERS

A Day After This Photograph Was Taken the "Sultana" Blew Up and the Loss of Life Among the Soldiers Aboard Made the Disaster the Greatest in Marine History, Only Surpassed by the Sinking of the "Titantic"

received polite notes of acknowledgment. Pamphlet after pamphlet on the subject he had published, setting forth the advantages of the ancient mode of warfare in the case of an emergency such as now threatened the Federal arms. But to no avail. Washington naval circles had only laughed at the landsman.

His booklets had indeed been read with interest by all the naval officers strung out along the Atlantic coast from New York to the tip of Florida. Some of them—some of the officers from the southern states—it now appeared had read with all too great an interest, Ellet must have mused regretfully. For now that the war was on, the shrewd Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Mallory, had been only too quick to seize upon the idea and make it useful to the Southerners. He and his assistant, Lieutenant Brooke, at Norfolk had built the monster ram *Virginia* out of the captured frigate *Merrimac*, and it had played havoc with the Yankee wooden ships in Hampton Roads and set all Washington shaking in its shoes.

Oh, yes, that was the way things had gone! The ram idea, discarded by the Federals to whom he had freely offered it, had proved mighty advantageous to the enemy! Bitterly Ellet reflected upon it. These dauntless Rebels had gone further; they had now turned their attention to the Mississippi and had built with incredible speed their fleet of river fighting boats —two of them rams—at New Orleans; while other rams, so it was reported, were in the process of build-

ing at ports on the tributaries, the Yazoo and Red Rivers.

But now—since the receipt of the telegram which he now held in his hand—Ellet was fairly well content. His last appeal to the government had not been in vain. The war department, not the navy department, had responded. No longer than six weeks ago he had written Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War at Washington:

"I have attempted to call the attention of the Navy Department so often to the subject during the last seven years that I almost hesitate to do so again. The Rebels now have five steam rams nearly ready for use. Of these five two are on the Lower Mississippi, two at Mobile, and one at Norfolk. The last of the five—the ram at Norfolk—is doubtless the most formidable, being the U. S. Steam Frigate *Merrimac* which has been so strengthened that in the opinion of the Rebels it may be used as ram. But we have not yet at sea, nor so far as I know in the course of construction, any vessel able to cope with a well-built ram. . . ."

It was this message to the war secretary that seemed to wake the government from its lethargy. And slap upon the heels of it had come news of the triumphant fight of the *Merrimac* and the destruction of the fine Yankee ships in Hampton Roads.

And then Stanton had acted quickly. He chose Charles Ellet to perform a difficult and ticklish task: the building and commanding of what in our latter

day parlance might have been called a mosquito fleet. Not only had Ellet been the instigator of the ram principle: he held a high reputation as the engineer who had planned and built bridges over the Potomac and Niagara Rivers, who had carried the Virginia Central Railroad (now the Chesapeake and Ohio) on an easy grade over the highest peak of the Blue Ridge Mountains, who had devoted considerable time to the study of Mississippi flood control and had advised measures which were to find their vindication more than a half century later. A Pennsylvanian by birth, Virginian by residence, he had met Stanton many times before the War began, and Stanton knew his man—knew him for his brilliance and unswerving loyalty to the Northern cause.

Ellet held no rank in the army or navy. Civilian though he was, he had been sent by Stanton post-haste to the headwaters of the Ohio with positive instructions to build and have ready "within twenty days" the ram fleet about which he had written and talked so much. He was authorized to ask for recruits—civilian steamboatmen—to serve for the duration of the enterprise. A hundred or so sharpshooters were to be detailed from certain named regiments of the Federal Army to be a force of what might be called "inland light marines." The rams were to carry no guns whatever since again and again Ellet had insisted that he had no use for them.

And so he had bought the steamboats at the Ohio River cities—Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Madison—pay-

ing as high as fourteen thousand dollars apiece for them. A large quantity of coal had been obtained and placed in two barges obtained for that purpose. Ellet had secured the services of excellent carpenters and of steamboat builders whose swift packets had made the Ohio and the Mississippi famous. These were even now working feverishly upon the necessary alterations in the steamboats which would enable them to bear the terrific shock of coming into contact under a full head of steam with the Confederate craft.

It would be difficult to imagine a stranger enterprise carried out in a stranger manner and with stranger instruments than the ram fleet enterprise. And yet Charles Ellet had faith in it: faith confirmed somewhat by the fact that back in 1855 he had treated with Russia during the Crimean War on the subject of providing rams for that government and would have done so, had not the war come suddenly to an end.

The *Merrimac's* successful use of the rams had further vindicated his opinion. And now old Stanton back there in Washington had at last recognized the wisdom of his scheme and also—to a certain degree—was permitting him to act independently, which he wished above all things.

Ellet looked again at the telegram in his hand.

CHARLES ELLET, *Esq.*:

. . . I authorize you to promise (to your crews) extra compensation for the capture and destruction of prizes,

the amount to be determined equably by the Secretary of War. You are authorized to add a guard of twelve to twenty men of the volunteers for each boat, to be commanded by a lieutenant of your own selection, the whole to be under the command of a common commander of higher grade; and in order to give you authority over the entire force, I propose to appoint you a colonel on the staff, to hold the rank so long as may be necessary for the complete execution of the enterprise.

It is unnecessary to say, except to guard against misapprehension, that your expedition must move upon the enemy with the concurrence of the naval commander of the Mississippi (Flag Officer Foote) for there must be no conflicting authority in the prosecution of the war. The peculiarity of the enterprise which you have undertaken induces the word "concurrence" instead of placing you directly under the naval commander on the same element as in war operations. The service you are engaged in is peculiar. The naval commander will be so advised and will be desired not to exercise control over your movements.

EDWIN M. STANTON.

Things were about ready, Ellet reflected, pacing up and down the New Albany levee, alongside which his boats had now come to rest, lashed nose in against the bank. Orders to move should be coming soon. Farragut with his fleet of ocean ships was hammering away at the Mississippi forts on the passes below New Orleans. Foote's fleet of ironclad gunboats, designed at St. Louis especially for river fighting by James Eads, later to become famous as a builder of bridges and jetties, was about ready to leave St. Louis and head off downstream, running the gaunt-

let of the string of forts by which the Confederates kept guard over the Father of Waters. These forts were located at Island Number Ten, Fort Pillow, Fort Randolph, Memphis and other points, and he was to fling in upon them shell from his mortars and shot from his ironclads' big guns. It was with this fleet that Ellet was to move southward with his rams to form a junction with Farragut, who was coming north when he should have captured New Orleans.

Two days were spent in waiting for certain machinery to arrive from Cincinnati. On April twenty-seventh Stanton wrote:

> We have certain intelligence that New Orleans has been captured. There appears to be no doubt of the fact. Commodore Farragut has orders to push immediately north to Memphis and join Commander Foote without waiting at New Orleans. You should lose no time in starting your fleet to the same place.

Preparations were hastened. Such reconstruction work as could be delayed was to be finished as the boats steamed down the river. Captain Alfred W. Ellet, a brother of Colonel Charles Ellet, late of the 59th Illinois Volunteers, had joined the ram fleet with a detachment of his own men who, with their new Springfield carbines and six-shooter pistols, were to serve as the sharpshooters on the rams. Alfred Ellet had been appointed second in command to his brother, the Colonel, and now wore on his shoulders the silver oak leaves of a lieutenant colonel.

But despite the intensive labor expended by the commander and his workmen it was not until the fifteenth of May that Ellet was able to advise the war office that his fleet was ready to leave—not as a whole, but two steamboats at a time, the entire fleet to reassemble at Cairo, the mouth of the Ohio, and join the ironclads in the Mississippi.

Ellet gathered his officers together and laid before them his plan of operation. He gave them extended instructions as to the movements of each vessel in the engagement.

"My object," he explained, "is to be the destruction of the enemy's vessels. Our method of defense will be simply to prevent any of the enemy from boarding our rams. We want to cut down every prize we can. If the cutting down of a Rebel boat means the loss of one of our boats, we will consider that our object has been gained: saving these rams is a secondary consideration."

The officers were to instruct their men in the use of small boats and life preservers. A system of signals was established both by flags and by boat whistles, by which Ellet could govern the movement of the assembled fleet from the deck of the boat chosen as his flagship—the *Switzerland,* later the *Queen of the West.*

Events in the South were shaping themselves towards the logical moment for the attack. Another telegram from Stanton on the twelfth told Ellet:

"Commodore Foote indicates great anxiety for the immediate descent of your rams. How soon will you be ready to start?"

The Secretary did not explain that Foote's fleet, now temporarily under the command of Flag Officer Charles H. Davis, had had a run-in the day before with Commodore Montgomery's Confederate fleet of rehabilitated steamboats and rams. The net result of which was that two of Davis' best ironclads had been sunk: the *Cincinnati* and the *Mound City*. Two of the Rebel boats, without firing a shot in answer to the Yankee gunboats, had swung ahead of their consorts, had plowed into Davis' fleet, sunk two of the ironclads, spread terror among the other vessels, and sent them skipping back upstream out of the danger zone. And then this Southern River Defense Fleet had calmly steamed down to Memphis and now lay safely under the shadow of Chickasaw Bluffs.

Here, with the nose of each of his vessels turned upstream and his lines ready to cast off, Montgomery awaited the Federal ironclads and (though he did not know it) Ellet's Ram Fleet as well.

Later, Ellet learned of the details of this fight, pacing the deck of the *Switzerland* just as she cast off. It gave him new cause for concern. This Rebel fleet he was going to encounter must in truth be a formidable antagonist. For the second time the Southerners had taken his ram idea and used it to their advantage—so well to their advantage that two more

Federal vessels had been put out of commission. That would have to stop.

To oppose this Confederate fleet, now coming north, was Davis' fleet of gunboats. Until a few months ago the politicians at Washington had maintained that these gunboats could stand up to any craft the Southerners, with their known scarcity of materials, could place upon the rivers.

But the Confederates' success with the rams had changed all that. The biggest and most heavily-armed Federal ship afloat would not be safe against a swift-moving sharp-beaked ram! The Federal authorities at Washington were thus now faced with a new problem. These dauntless Rebels! They had taken some old steamboats down on the Lower River, equipped them for ramming and they had sunk two of the most formidable gunboats in the West! The Eads ironclads could not stand up to the rams! If this kept on the whole Federal program of shipbuilding would have to be changed to meet the new adversary. The sooner Ellet went down there on the Lower River with his rams and met the Rebels the better it would be for the North!

And so Stanton had wired Ellet to hurry on southward and match his strength against the fleet of Montgomery. He was to cooperate with Commodore Davis of the gunboat fleet, but was not to be under his command. And in view of what followed, one may gather that for the success of the enterprise

it is just as well that Ellet was not under Davis' command. For a trepidation and unwillingness to attack seems to have seized upon the ironclads' commander that about paralleled that of McClellan on the Virginia Peninsula.

Ellet wrote Stanton on the twenty-sixth:

"I arrived with my fleet yesterday [just above Fort Pillow], leaving one of my boats at New Albany ready to follow within twenty-four hours. I visited Commodore Davis immediately to obtain his views and offer co-operation. The Commodore intimates unwillingness to assume any risk at this time, but will communicate with me again after further reflection touching my proposition to him to run below those batteries and surprise the enemy's fleet and transports before they can escape up the tributaries. To me, the risk is greater to lie here with my small squadron and within an hour's march of the enemy, than to run by the batteries and make the attack."

The third day of June found Davis still vacillating and Ellet still fretting to be at grips with the enemy. And at last, unable to hazard any further delay, Ellet wrote Stanton that he was ready to attempt the enterprise alone. He would notify Commodore Davis of his intention, of course, and he took upon his own shoulders the full responsibility for his attack. And just then Davis overcame his reluctance and decided to attack also.

Mist and a heavy haze hung over the slithery Mississippi on the morning of June 6th. The Ram Fleet's commander had made the *Queen of the West* his

flagship. At six o'clock, as the first rays of the sun glimmered over the Tennessee bluffs, the *Queen* glided easily alongside the *Benton,* Commodore Davis' flagship. Ellet had come to make known to the naval officer that he was off to fight on his own hook.

Standing on the *Queen's* hurricane roof, he could see the city-crowned bluffs of the Tennessee shore below. He could only guess the mist-hidden Arkansas shore opposite. Between these two shores flowed the mysterious river—chocolate-colored, silent, bearing upon its breast two miles below the fleet of unknown proportions now advancing to meet him, safely hidden behind that screen of mist.

He was going into battle, into his first battle, into the strangest battle in the history of modern warfare. Well he knew that the affair would be swift, once he sighted the enemy. There would be no desultory firing. It would be touch-and-go—dash for the nearest Confederate craft, knock in her sides and the sides of as many of her consorts as possible, and then escape back up the river as best he could. He scanned the river. Commodore Davis' gunboats which had been anchored round about—five in all since the loss of the *Cincinnati* and the *Mound City*—now were getting under way. The guards of the *Queen* rubbed along the sides of the *Benton.* As Ellet was on the point of stepping aboard the *Benton,* a sullen, muffled *boom* resounded down the river and a shell whined through the air just above his head. Civilian that he

had always been, Ellet had never smelled the smoke of battle before. But there was no hesitating, no drawing back.

"Round to and head straight down the river!" he called to his pilot up there in the pilot house above him. He looked behind. The faithful *Monarch*, with his brother Alfred in command, was a few hundred feet away; but two other big rams, the *Lancaster* and the *Switzerland*, lay half a mile upstream; while the towboats, the *Lioness*, the *Sampson* and the *Mingo*, with their heavy tows had, under his direction, kept far in the rear.

Even as the *Queen* began rounding to in the current, Davis' ironclad gunboats cast off and swept forward towards Memphis. Turning, Ellet called through a megaphone to his brother who stood in plain sight on the deck of the *Monarch:* "Come ahead, Alfred!" and swung his sword aloft. No military man—Charles Ellet—and little acquainted with Navy etiquette; but he made himself understood!

Davis' gunboats had immediately replied to the first shot from the enemy. And now from the heavy bank of fog came the alternate crash and whine of the Southerners' shells, which the Yankees returned with interest.

The *Queen* and the *Monarch* had now rounded to; the gunboats were slightly in the lead. But the two rams plowed forward, caught up with the first line of the Davis boats, passed them, and moved straight into the unknown area ahead. To the mist bank

which was slowly rising in wisps under the first efforts of the morning sun, was added a cloud of powder smoke equally as thick. Below him, inside the *Queen* as Ellet stood on the hurricane roof alone, he could hear the hurried preparations for battle—the sharp orders of the lieutenant commanding the score of sharpshooters which made up his sole armament.

To the *Queen's* right and just behind came the *Monarch*. The forecastles of both boats were silent and deserted: the sharpshooters were all behind the bulkheads primed to pick off the enemy. Like two hungry hawks poking forth their beaks, the two steamboats swung over the intervening space.

Suddenly the solid bank of fog and smoke seemed to part of its own will to make room for the advance of the Confederate boats. Out of the mist they came, and to the commander of the Federal boats on the *Queen's* hurricane roof they seemed to loom doubly large in the half light: two huge steamboats, fully as large as his own, heavily buttressed with boards and cotton bales, and having, like his own rams, beaks reaching out in front. And each, worse luck, carried a single brass field piece on its forecastle. A gasp of consternation went from all on board the *Queen*—mainly from the infantrymen sharpshooters to whom this sort of fighting was an entirely new business.

"Steady, you sharpshooters!" Ellet called down to them. "Get ready!"

Only a hundred yards intervened between the two

lines. The Confederate boats swept nearer. Now Ellet could make out their full lineaments: the curving decks, the vicious-looking beaks, the tall smokestacks—the whole of the silent, sinister-looking monsters so like his own. Now, through his glasses he could read the names on their pilot houses, the *General Lovell* and the *Jeff Thompson*, the *Lovell* slightly in the lead and driving forward under a full head of steam.

There was a tightening of tension in every fibre of the *Queen*. Her engines, increased from half-ahead to full-ahead, breathed in quicker and deeper respiration. She seemed to spring forward. Her nearest antagonist, the *General Lovell*, drove ahead to meet her. The *Monarch* found herself headed directly for the *Jeff Thompson*.

Closer they drew together, the *Queen* and the *Lovell*, each aiming its beak directly at the beak of the other. Traveling with the current, the *Queen* was moving at about twenty miles an hour; the *General Lovell* moving against the current, at about fourteen miles an hour, when they struck.

Had the two vessels met stem to stem, it is hard to say what might have resulted; naval history on the rivers would likely have been very different. As it was the *Lovell*, handicapped by the current against which she was traveling, veered slightly to the left. That sealed her fate.

The vessels came together with a crash and crunching sound that could be heard by the watchers on the

bluffs of the city a mile below. The *Queen's* beak, taking her adversary squarely on the guards some twenty feet back of her stem, cut through her like a rip saw, clove her hull timbers apart, pierced her entrails. The dark waters rushed madly into the *Lovell's* hull and she settled rapidly. Her crew jumped overboard and those who were not drowned or killed by the sharpshooters and the big guns from Davis' ironclads, were picked up by Federal small boats and taken prisoners. Only eighteen out of eighty-six escaped.

But the *Queen's* fierce assault, successful though it had been, cost her dearly. For the *Lovell* held fast in her side for some minutes after the thrust the beak of the *Queen*. It seemed as though the sinking *Lovell* would drag her antagonist down with her. By the time Ellet's boat had finally wrenched herself loose from the *Lovell*, the *Beauregard*, another of Montgomery's rams, tore into the *Queen's* larboard wheel, ripped loose her wheelhouse and sent her creeping into shoal water, totally disabled.

As Charles Ellet gave the command reluctantly to retire, a pistol ball struck him in the knee and he dropped to the hurricane deck wounded.

Meanwhile Alfred Ellet on the *Monarch* had been having no holiday time. At the moment the *Queen* sailed in to clean up the *Lovell*, the *Monarch* was all set to receive the impact of the *Jeff Thompson*, which was headed towards her though nearly a hundred yards away. Before half that distance had been

traversed the *Thompson's* machinery broke, her steering gear snapped, and she slowed over to one side. Immediately the intrepid Montgomery, commander of the Southern fleet, from the deck of the *Little Rebel* signalled the *General Price* to step into the *Thompson's* place. And the *Monarch* found herself, in less time than it takes to tell it, bearing down upon an antagonist fully as formidable as the one which had formerly steered against her.

Once more two rams faced each other—steamboat against steamboat, beak against beak. And once more, had not the current of that treacherous old river intervened, history might have had a different tale to transmit to posterity. For if those two beaks had jammed one directly against the other, it is hard to say which boat, if either, would have survived. The Confederates might have sunk the *Monarch*, and before the other two Ellet rams had come up, might have played hob with all of Davis' ironclad gunboats. The Mississippi might have remained in the hands of the South. But the current apparently was on the Union side in this instance. Just before the *Monarch* and *Price* closed in their death grapple, the *Price* was swerved from her sure course the matter of a few inches. A glancing blow resulted.

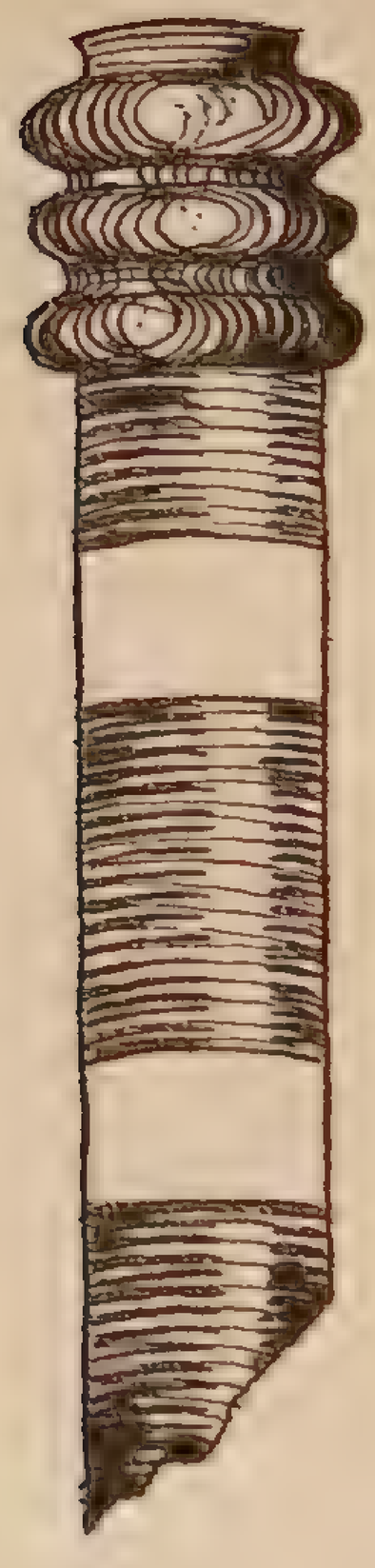
"The prolonged crash and the creaking and groaning of timbers," says an eye witness, "was fearful; and the vessels ground past each other rolling and pitching like giants in mortal combat." And it fared ill with the Southern boat. For the *Monarch* dragged

so fiercely and closely along her sides she carried away a wheel and crushed in several ribs. The *Price* began to take water like a thirsty sailor.

Rounding to, Alfred Ellet drove his *Monarch* back among the Confederate boats. Immediately the *General Bragg*, a rehabilitated Gulf steamer, made for her, her nose aimed at the Yankee's vulnerable wheelhouse. At this point the wisdom of Ellet's placing a force of sharpshooters on his rams became manifest. These infantrymen, from behind their bulkheads, now trained their Springfields on the *Bragg's* pilot house. A man appeared at her wheel; he fell pierced with bullets. Another stepped into his place and fell, transfixed. Another and still another pilot fell, while the *Bragg*, left to her own devices, plowed blindly in all directions but the right one. On the *Monarch's* other side the *Beauregard*, which had rammed the *Queen*, now nosed in to finish the *Monarch;* but she, swift and wily packet that she was, slipped quickly out of the way and let the two Rebel rams come together.

And with such impact did they clash that each went to her death bravely in the chocolate waters. Thus four boats—the most formidable of the River Defense Fleet—had been put out of way by the two Ellets on their steamboat rams. This enabled Commodore Davis with his heavy guns to do the rest. The Arkansas shore, dimly seen through the mist, was now dotted with Confederate wrecks. The fight, which had lasted less than an hour, had now drifted

down opposite the main portion of the city: proud Memphis, undefended by even a force of home guards, her last able-bodied man off fighting with Beauregard, was now at the mercy of her invaders.



PART FIVE

SECOND WIND

CHAPTER I

STEAMBOATS COME BACK DESPITE MARK TWAIN

TO that star-crossed and erratic genius, Lafcadio Hearn, America's earliest and best newspaper columnist, we are indebted for what is probably the most satisfying short description of steamboating from the Ohio cities to New Orleans. It appeared in his column entitled *Fantastics* in the New Orleans *Times-Democrat* of May 2, 1882. Hearn had come South only a few years before. His first sight of the crescent-curving harbor of New Orleans was from the deck of the big packet *Thompson Dean* as he approached it in 1877, and he seems never to have forgotten it. His international reputation as a literary genius, won since then, has made us largely lose sight of his early daily column newspaper activities in the Crescent City.

"The romance of river life," he wrote, "is not like the romance of the sea—that romance which memory evokes for us in the midst of the city by the simple exhalations of an asphalt pavement under the sun: divine saltiness, celestial freshness, the wild joy of wind-kissed waves, the hum of rigging and crackling

of cordage, the rocking as of a mighty cradle. But it is perhaps sweeter.

"There is no perceptible motion of the river vessel; it is like the movement of a balloon, so steady that not we, but the world only seems to move. Under the stars the river seems to unroll its endlessness like an immeasurable ribbon of silver purple. There is a noiseless ripple in it as of watered silk. There is a heavy sweet smell of nature, of luxuriant verdure; the feminine outline of the hills, dotted with the chrome yellow of window lights, are blue black; the vast arch of stars blossoms overhead; there is no sound save the colossal breathing of the laboring engines. The stream widens; the banks lessen; the heavens seems to grow deeper, the stars whiter, the blue bluer. Under the night it is all a blue world, as in a planet illuminated by a colored sun.

"The calls of the passing boats, sonorous as the music of vast silver trumpets, ring out clear but echoless—there are now no hills to give back a ghostly answer. Days are born in gold and die in rose color; and the stream widens, widens, broadens towards the eternity of the sea under the eternity of the sky.

"We sail out of northern frosts into southern lukewarmness, into the luxuriant and somnolent smell of magnolias and lemon blossoms—the sugar coast exhales its incense of welcome. And then, the giant crescent of lights, the steam song of joyous boats, the world of chimneys, the forests of spars, the burst of



The finest steamboat of all: the *J. M. White,* New Orleans, Vicksburg and Bends packet.

morning glory over New Orleans, viewed from the deck of a pilot house . . .

"These may never be wholly forgotten. After the lapse of fifty years in some dusty and dreary inland city, an echo, an odor, a printed name, may resurrect these recollections, fresh as one of those Gulf winds that leave sweet odors after them, like coquettish women, like Talmudic angels."

The occasion for the particular "Fantastic" from which this quotation is lifted was a visit to New Orleans of an old river pilot named Mark Twain. In that year of 1882 Twain was gathering material for his delightful and thoroughly lopsided book "Life on the Mississippi." When the book appeared a few years later, Twain said steamboating on the Mississippi system was dead. In fact, according to his calculations, it must have been dead about ten years when Hearn thus commemorated the humorist's visit in 1882.

Mark Twain's statement was that steamboating had begun in 1812 and in thirty years had reached its zenith and in another thirty years was a dead issue in American activities. That would have placed the funeral of steamboating somewhere in 1872.

Now here is a remarkable thing. Had Hearn, on the day he wrote that little vignette, walked out of the old *Times-Democrat* office and out Canal Street to the river, he must certainly have thought that Mark's account of the death of steamboating was, like the one-time premature account of the death of Mark

himself, greatly exaggerated. The "corpse" of American steamboating lay stretched out along the levee as far as Hearn could have seen in either direction—very much alive.

In those days of the early eighties, one walked toward the river out Canal Street beneath the overhanging balconies of old business blocks which as yet had not fallen before the march of modernity, past the great granite custom house which Beauregard designed and built, across the Louisville and Nashville railroad tracks, and ascended the gradually sloping levee to the level of the river.

No miles of warehouses and covered ship docks bordered the river banks then. Wooden platforms for loading and unloading millions of bales of cotton and barrels of sugar and a multitudinous array of general freight and over which a constant stream of passengers passed in and out were built over the top of the levee and sloped down to the batture at the water's edge. Tarpaulins protected huge piles of freight. And there, rearing swanlike bodies aloft, a mile-long row of such steamboats as the river people of pre-war days had never dreamed, pushed importantly against the shore.

A very live corpse—this corpse of American steamboating!

Had you walked upstream along the levee, you would have found the boats at their regular landing places. First of all, the mighty boats for the Mississippi cotton trade, for Vicksburg, Greenville and the

Bends—palatial beyond all the visions of even the most ambitious steamboatmen of the fifties. A dozen of them—steamboats belonging to Captain John W. Cannon and Captain Thomas P. Leathers and Captain John Tobin, among others, each vying with the other to turn out grander steamboats to care for a trade that demanded them.

Elbowing these closely, were the Memphis boats; and the renowned Anchor Liners—St. Louis packets with a gold anchor swung between their smokestacks—came next in line. The Louisville and Cincinnati boats lay next—"O" Line boats and boats of the Cincinnati, Memphis and New Orleans line—long, slender sternwheelers, each one. After these, a mighty array of freight barges and towboats: the Mississippi Valley Transportation Company of St. Louis designed mainly to carry grain from St. Louis markets to New Orleans.

On the downstream side of Canal Street, as you walked the levee down through the borders of the Vieux Carré, an even larger army of steamboats met your eye. Red River steamboats, eighteen of them every week—three a day—making trips to Red River after cotton and other produce. About opposite Bienville Street were the numerous boats for the gentle rivers and bayous with the delightfully archaic names—names that for one man at least flow as smoothly and pleasantly as the unhurried currents of their own slender channels—the Ouachita, the Atchafalaya, the Yazoo River. The bayou boats lay next.

In passing it might be explained that a bayou is a queer body of water different from any other in that it flows *out of* instead of *into* a large body of water! Traversing sections of Louisiana between the Mississippi and the Atchafalaya, the Mississippi and Lake Ponchartrain, the Atchafalaya and the Sabine River at the Texas border, these mysterious streams go nosing into the richest prairie and plantation sections of the state. And sometimes, overhanging the somnolent sleepy streams, the live oaks and magnolias, gnarled of limb and long of bough, droop down on either side and so near to one another that the steamboat from the busy marts of New Orleans, coming to bring supplies and passengers and to carry away gigantic loads of cotton, would send her smoke pouring up through the tops of the trees and her blended whistle notes fluting ahead over the waters to startle the sleepy alligators and the heron and the wild ducks.

Their names ring quaintly and pleasantly upon our ears, as do the stories of the times when the coming of that daily steamboat was sufficient excitement to bring every human being within a radius of many miles to the landing to witness the incoming and the departure: Bayou La Fourche, Bayou Teche, in the famed Evangeline country, Bayou Macom, Bayou D'Arbonne, Bayou Bœuf, Bayou Barataria, Bayou Courtableau, Bayou des Glaise. . . .

In 1882 steamboating had indeed lost somewhat in weight, but was still a healthy creature. Even the encroachments of the railroads which every year ex-

tended longer tentacles of steel through the territory served by the steamboats, paralleling the river closely, and using every device to get the river trade, had failed to kill it; had failed to reduce it to "a mere shadow of its former self." The character of the river traffic had changed. The number of steamboats in the through trade, the long runs, had certainly fallen off because the railroads could easily get that trade away from the boats. But there had been a compensatory increase in the port-to-port river trade and in the cotton and sugar trade which the steamboats had first brought into being and fostered, and to take care of which steamboat owners were now building larger and ever larger boats. And the very competition of the railroads of a necessity compelled the steamboat interests to put forth their utmost to provide their clientele with every comfort, convenience and luxury that within them lay.

And while the freight business of individual boats had declined to a low point, there now plowed along the rivers from the northernmost Ohio city to New Orleans, great tows of coal and produce. A genius was that unknown river man who conceived the idea of lashing an acre or two of loaded barges together and pushing them down to market with a steamboat!

The levee at New Orleans remained still a sort of crossroads of the world—a meeting place for immigrant, emigrant, pleasure traveler, and the world at large. Side by side now at the levee lay steamboats

and steamships. A hundred yards away railroad cars rolled frequently into the train sheds. All day and all night that fascinating levee was the scene of intense activity; and when it was first illuminated with the new-fangled electric arc lights in the eighties the matter was considered important enough for the newspapers of the country to herald it on the front page.

In short, steamboating in 1882 was getting its second wind. The finest boats were afloat. Larger and more palatial boats were yet to be built, and the best year for the Howard shipyards lay more than a decade ahead.

. . . . . .

A hard pull, a very hard pull, had it been for the steamboatmen to make a comeback following the war. No industry, it is likely, suffered so much as did the steamboat industry because of that conflict. The end of the struggle found the entire main stem of the lower river and the tributaries devoid of anything like a regular steamboat service. What was worse, there seemed to be a general yearning for greater speed on the part of the people than the steamboats would ever be able to supply. Hundreds of wrecked, rotting and decrepit steamboats lay hidden up the southern tributaries whence they fled to escape destruction by the contending armies. Some could be reconditioned; many were worthless. Southern steamboatmen suffered more than northern steamboatmen, since all the fighting had taken place on the

southern waters and because there was in the South a terrible scarcity of capital—the inevitable aftermath of war for a conquered people.

Even in the North conditions after the war were such for the river men that a mighty effort was necessary to gather the broken threads of interrupted progress and get business under weigh again. Not but that there were plenty of big boats. There were.

True, the old Railroad Line and the Lightning Line had ceased to operate when the war had blocked traffic. Moreover, the vast majority of the individually-owned steamboats had gone from the rivers. But the needs of the federal government during the war had demanded numerous big packets on the Ohio and Mississippi for transportation of troops and supplies. This need had induced the construction of about two score fine steamboats in the neighborhood of St. Louis and at the Ohio cities. These in 1865 lay idle and waiting to be put to use.

They were great, swift, and commodious side-wheelers; a splendid nucleus upon which the northern steamboat interests could build up another inland merchant marine to serve both North and South. There was not sufficient business for the owners to operate these big carriers separately. And so, putting to use that time-worn but serviceable maxim "in Union there is strength," the various owners of these big boats early in 1866 pooled their resources. The result was the hugest steamboat combination the West had yet known. Organized into a mighty joint-

stock corporation, the amount of the capital stock being equal to the assessed value of the boats, which a disinterested committee had placed at $2,240,000 (remember it was 1866 and that *was* a huge amount), the company chose a high-sounding name—the Atlantic and Mississippi Steamship Corporation. Steam*ship*, if you please! It was a name as calculated to impress the public mind as was the huge capital back of it. Some reason there was, however, for deep water connotation in the name of the company, for by a working agreement, through tickets of the steamboats were honored on connecting steamship lines out of New Orleans to New York and foreign ports.

John J. Roe, an experienced steamboatman of Pittsburgh, formerly active in the Railroad Line, was chosen president. It was said to be the wealthiest and most extensive steam navigation company in existence. By a system of coupon tickets, good on all connecting railroads, it became a medium of transportation of national and international importance.

But for all that, the organizers had much to learn about big business, as the stockholders learned by bitter experience. They learned, mainly, that members of a closed corporation who leave the administration of their business to men whose chief interest is in the monthly pay check, non-stockholders, will soon find it being run beautifully—into the ground. Given *carte blanche*, the captains of the various steamboats in the Atlantic and Mississippi Line set out in a mad

race with one another, the patent object being which boat could set the finest table, could show forth the most dazzling napery and candelabra, could make the greatest speed: could, in short, make itself the most popular. This was commendable, as far as it went. All thought of economy of operation, however, disappeared. Hence, although the company was doing a land office business between St. Louis and the far South, the overhead was eating up the profits at so swift a rate that a few more years would spell catastrophe.

More, too, the company was getting "up stage." It saw fit to disregard certain government contract business, that it otherwise might have had, for the more immediately profitable passenger business. Now government contracts, although frequently let at lower figures than private freight contracts, form the sure basis of a cargo in any direction. Some wise competitors, owners of boats which had been excluded from the Atlantic and Mississippi at the time of the formation of its joint stock company, whirled in and got the government contract and gradually began taking away a goodly portion of the combine's business.

To make matters worse, adversity hit the Atlantic and Mississippi early in 1867. Three of their best boats exploded at the St. Louis wharf for the reason that bad iron had gone into their boilers. And the reason for the bad iron was that the war had taken all the good iron. In less than six months others of

their boats sank, taking down with them passengers and valuable cargoes. Creditors pressed. The stock that twelve months previous had sold at par was now a drug on the market. Assessments made upon the stockholders served to stave off temporarily the failure that was sure to come.

The company went on the rocks. More appropriately, since we are speaking of river steamboats, one might say it went permanently on a sand bar. Those stockholders who could get out from under, to carry the simile a little further, left the sinking ship. The Atlantic and Mississippi Steamship Company had failed.

Thus perished the largest steamboat company up to that time. With it vanished several fortunes. One stockholder held $450,000 in shares. Bad management and lack of what we have come to call modern business methods were mainly responsible for the catastrophe. But to meet the demand which still clamored for more steamboats another company immediately gathered together what was left of the old Atlantic and Mississippi, added a few other fine boats to the line, and set bravely out as the St. Louis and New Orleans Packet Company. Under that name and later that of the Merchants Southern Line Packet Company the organization prospered for nearly a decade. Captain John Boffinger was the president, succeeded by Captain I. F. Baker. Most of the captains were large stockholders. Then along about 1879 a reorganization took place and a new company

emerged from the old known as the Anchor Line which was to endure and with profit until the opening of the next century.

The promptness and regularity of the Anchor Line service has made the name of the company a byword in the Mississippi Valley. Soon discarding all the old boats that had hung over after the war, the company developed a type of boat all its own, lacking outwardly somewhat in the grace which larger boats possessed but being about two hundred and fifty feet long, with spacious, luxurious cabin; swift and commodious; all of them built by the Howards. One and all they were named after cities and towns along the Mississippi. Among the largest of these Anchor Liners was the *City of Baton Rouge* on which Mark Twain made his return trip up the river after the visit to New Orleans in 1882, ten years after he had said steamboating was dead. And as fate would have it, the captain of the *City of Baton Rouge* was none other than Mark's old boss pilot, Horace Bixby!

CHAPTER II

GOLDEN DAYS IN THE COTTON COUNTRY

IN the far South, meanwhile, the individual southern steamboatmen were looking after the needs of their own section. Even while Louisiana was yet struggling to throw off the effects of the recent Carpet-bag rule and resume her rightful place among the states of the Union, cotton planting, sugar raising, the business of life peculiar to the denizens of the lower river country, moved forward as of old. Crops must be planted, the cotton gathered; travel back and forth between plantations of "the Bends" or the bayous and New Orleans must needs go forward, if houses were to be built and children to be educated. And to meet that need the southern steamboat builders and owners had placed upon the rivers before 1880 a fleet of carriers such as the world has not seen before nor since. One wonders to-day where they got the capital to do it!

Carrying cotton, as has already been indicated, demanded a peculiar type of steamboat with very wide guards so that the bales could be stacked tier upon tier up as high, sometimes, as the hurricane roof. Beside transporting cotton, each steamboat must serve as a common carrier for passengers who demanded the comforts which a wealthy and luxurious

populace had learned to expect. She must be large enough to transport trainloads (literally) of miscellaneous freight. She must carry an army of negro roustabouts and have ample accommodation for that cargo of human freight which could not afford to travel cabin passage—deck passengers at two dollars a head.

No railroads in 1882 paralleled the Mississippi between Memphis and New Orleans. Out of the latter city and up across the swampy prairies the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern Railway reached out in an airline to join hands eventually, by utilizing a number of small intervening roads, with the Illinois Central. But that railroad ran miles away from the river. Along the rivers the populace still depended upon the steamboats. Indeed, many New Orleans and Memphis people preferred travel by steamboat to travel by railroad where there was an even choice between the two. And it is a striking commentary upon the swiftness with which we have come forward along the road generally thought to be the road of progress to recall that fifty years ago in any part of our now well-populated sections railroads were still more or less distrusted as new and untried experiments.

One could go by railroad if one wished, but it necessitated numerous changes and delays. By steamboat, on the other hand, one had only to get aboard, be assured of the finest company and food during the days that were necessary to carry one to

one's destination. And one could *rest* on the way. What if it did require a few days longer? The virus of speed had not yet entered the veins of the people along the Mississippi: they had plenty of time to spare.

And they trusted the steamboats and the steamboatmen from long and intimate acquaintance. Witness, as proof of this, the manner in which cotton was shipped to market. Since a type known as the "cotton carrier" steamboat had been developed, a steamboat system for the shipping of cotton to New Orleans assigned to the various cotton factors had been likewise developed.

Here in brief is the manner in which it was accomplished:

The cotton, having been gathered, ginned, and baled at some one of the hundreds of plantations on the river or not far from the river, is now ready to be shipped to New Orleans. On the burlap covering of each bale the planter places his mark—usually his initials. Should one of his negro tenants working on shares have grown that particular bale, his initials or mark are placed under those of the planter. Cotton floats carry that bale along with the others from the plantations to the levee. Here the stack of bales awaits the coming of a steamboat of the regular line in the New Orleans trade. She rounds to at the planter's landing, sidles grandly into shore, the stage plank shoots out and settles easily on the bank. Off swarm a host of roustabouts—ragged, picturesque,

musical negroes—the dark and *floating* population (as one may very well say) of the river cities: sturdy fellows, every one. Then commences the loading.

Each rouster takes a bale, rolls it end over end down the bank and up the stage, returning at once for another bale. And as they work there rises in the air the crooning, semi-barbaric strains of the coonjine songs:

De coonjine, jine de coonjine.
De coonjine, jine de coonjine.
Roll dat cotton bale down de hill,
De coonjine, jine de coonjine.

—or some other such elevating and fascinating ditty. The boat leaves no receipt for the cotton. The planter knows and trusts the steamboatmen implicitly. He has a pre-arrangement with the captain of this boat to haul all his cotton. These bales are loaded among the other bales which, if it be during the height of the season, are stacked tier upon tier high up to the hurricane deck. On the down trip to New Orleans, a manifest containing the number of bales and the names of their consignees is made out by the clerk of the boat and hung conspicuously in the cabin.

Up to this time the factor to whom the cotton is shipped knows nothing of the consignment. When the boat arrives at New Orleans, a discharging clerk takes charge of the unloading of the cargo, and here begins an interesting operation.



CAPTAIN COOLEY'S FAMOUS PACKET "AMERICA" UNLOADING COTTON AT NEW ORLEANS

Before she has rounded to, numbers of negro stevedores gather on the wharf near the spot where she makes a landing, all eager to go to work rolling and trucking the cotton out. For the roustabout leaves the unloading to the stevedores: he gets his pay and goes to get himself a drink.

A negro foreman in the employ of the discharging clerk stands on a truck or some other elevation and is immediately surrounded by the laborers, each clamoring for a work ticket. The foreman selects the requisite number—sometimes as many as two hundred—and gives them their tickets. By this time the boat has landed. After considerable labor stage-planks are placed from the cotton tier to the wharf. Then begins the discharging. The clerk stands at the lower end of the stage, ready to place the cargo in lots on the wharf, according to the shipment, each consignee having his lot to himself.

Were this labor accomplished in the ordinary way it would require a very great expenditure of time. Examining marks and ordering the laborers to truck Mr. Smith's cotton to Mr. Smith's lot would be a difficult operation. The unlettered negroes would undoubtedly confuse matters hopelessly. So their knowledge of ordinary objects is called upon to serve them. Flags with familiar emblems serve to designate the piles for the different factors.

The discharging clerk who has thoroughly engraved on his memory the names of every consignee, orders a bale out of the tier on deck. Into it he

sticks an iron rod marked by a flag with a white ball on a black background. That indicates the place of every bale for that consignee. Another bale for another consignee is marked with a red diamond flag. These marks the negroes understand.

Then the work commences in earnest, and the bales from the boat go by the discharging clerk almost as fast as he can call out.

"Blue Anchor!"

"Black Cross!"

"White Flag!"

"Red Ball!"

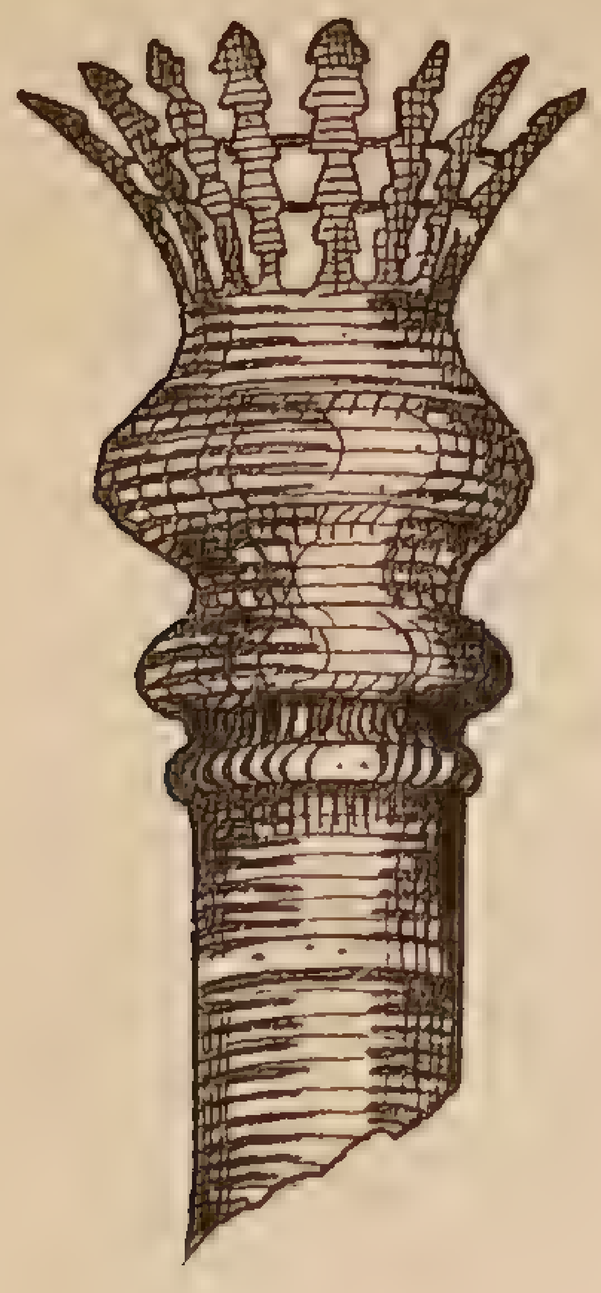
And so on. He must be able, this clerk, at a glance to take in the mark on the bale, and remember what flag denotes this consignee's lot—a work of the memory which is remarkable. Especially when there are sometimes as many as sixty flags flying on the New Orleans levee!

The moment the cotton touches the landing, and even during the process of landing, it comes under the ægis of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange. This organization's levee inspectors protect it from theft, see that it is covered with tarpaulin from the weather, that it is not rolled in the mud, and otherwise see to it that no damage may come to it. A chief levee inspector and his assistants look to this.

"Nowhere in the world," says an old guidebook to New Orleans, published in 1884 and edited by Lafcadio Hearn, "is cotton handled so expeditiously as on the levee at New Orleans and the manner in

which cotton is discharged from the boats reads as remarkable to those unacquainted with this rapid mode of taking off freight."

As an illustration, the *J. M. White III,* Captain John Tobin's fine steamboat, arrived in port a little after six o'clock one morning with six thousand bales of cotton and four thousand sacks of cotton seed on board. At 11.45 the cargo had all been discharged and that evening at five o'clock the great steamer was standing up the river again, loaded with passengers and freight to bring down another cargo of cotton.



CHAPTER III

THE RACE OF THE *ROBERT E. LEE*

"I bet on the *Lee!*" exclaimed a young Creole, Armand DeFuentes, to his friend, Gordon, in the lobby of the old St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans, on an afternoon in late June, 1870. "I bet on the *Lee*, not because I think necessarily she is the faster boat, but because of the honored name she bears! Now, Gordon, *mon ami,* stand up for the boat you are backing!"

"Five hundred on the *Natchez* because I think she is the better boat!" Gordon was nothing if not practical.

"Done!" exclaimed the Creole. And the bet was arranged.

A sample, this was, of the betting done not only in the river cities but in many larger cities in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Great Britain and France, on that late June day. Not all bet on their favorites for the same reason. Many believed that Captain John W. Cannon's *Robert E. Lee* was in very truth the faster of the two contestants. The *Natchez*, belonging to and commanded by Captain Thomas P. Leathers, had her thousands of backers who were—if they had it—willing to lay down the

cold cash that the latter boat was the faster of the two.

Down at the foot of Canal Street at the levee the two huge swan-like steamboats lay, resting their white breasts against the shore—eager to start. It was four o'clock, June 30, 1870. For months this long contest of the powers of the two boats has been heralded throughout the world. No sport so regal or enthralling as two mighty steamboats racing one against another! And such a race course! A twelve hundred-mile stretch of tawny Mississippi winding away from New Orleans harbor northward to St. Louis! Never had New Orleans known such crowds as those which thronged her streets on this day of days.

Not many men are alive to-day who saw that race. Nearly sixty years have passed, and there have been disputes as to the this and that particular of the great steamboat race itself, which most likely will never be entirely settled. Some have held that the *Lee* had an unfair advantage in that her captain prepared for the race ahead of time, whereas the *Natchez's* owner made no preparation at all and had taken a large consignment of freight and a long passenger list.

One man, however—John P. Coleman, a scholar and gentleman, now secretary to the Mayor of New Orleans, saw the race—saw it from the deck of another steamboat as he was returning home from school in the North. So, since he knows good deal about

steamboating in general, we shall just take his description of it and accept it as authentic:

"The contestants, the sidewheel steamers *Robert E. Lee* and *Natchez*, two of the finest packets of their time, were employed in the trade between New Orleans and Vicksburg, and famous no less for their beauty than the luxury of their appointments and a service imparting to their cuisine the distinction of an art, in its way, incomparable. Besides these characteristics, they possessed in an eminent degree a record for great speed, which had frequently been tried and at no time found wanting. Both boats were built, owned and commanded by Kentuckians, both of whom had for years been intimately connected with the lower Mississippi river trade, in which they employed the finest and speediest boats going back to a period antedating the Civil War.

"Captain Thomas P. Leathers had built as many as five large, record-making steamboats, each bearing the name *Princess;* and subsequently as many as seven of the name of *Natchez*. Captain John W. Cannon, owner and builder of the *Robert E. Lee*, like Captain Leathers, was the master of many fine steamboats, the most famous being two steamers known as the *Robert E. Lee*, and lastly, the *John W. Cannon*, a tribute to the old steamboat man himself, who had done so much toward the development of the lower Mississippi, making travel thereon not only a convenience, but a luxury equaled by no other like travel in the world.

"The most famous of the *Natchez* tribe was the sixth of that name, a product of the Cincinnati Marine Ways, and the one that made the race with the *Lee* in 1870. The *Natchez* had eight boilers and thirty-four-inch cylinders, ten-foot stroke, with a carrying capacity of five thousand five hundred bales of cotton.

"The *Robert E. Lee,* built at New Albany, Indiana, in 1866, soon after the close of the Civil War, was three years the senior of her great rival. It was deemed advisable to tow the boat over to the Kentucky side of the Ohio river to have her name painted on her wheel houses. The *Lee,* although a smaller boat, looked much larger than the *Natchez,* the *Lee's* tonnage being 1,467, while that of the *Natchez* was 1,547. The machinery on both boats was about equal.

"Nothing could be more deceptive than the appearance of these two boats. The *Lee* seemed to the untrained eye to rise higher out of the water, and looked decidedly wider and longer than the *Natchez*.

" 'Never,' observed the *Picayune,* in its issue of June 29, 1870, 'was there a more beautiful steamboat, either in motion or stationary, than the *Natchez*.'

" 'Never before in New Orleans, or throughout the whole world, for that matter,' said an editorial in the *Picayune* of July 1, 1870, 'has there been such excitement regarding a steamboat race as exists at the present time between these two great rival floating palaces, the *Robert E. Lee* and the *Natchez*.'

"In the clubs and sporting circles, in workshops, in

stores, and in the market places, as well as in the privacy of the home, the race was the sole absorbing topic of discussion. The windows of neighboring buildings, balconies and other points of vantage whence the harbor could be viewed were thronged with spectators. Millions of dollars exchanged hands over the result of the race, the betting during the contest, and for several days before that event, being greatly in excess of most other transactions in the principal exchanges of the contemporary commercial world.

"The *Natchez* made practically no preparation for the race, beyond having ordered, by the steamer *Thompson Dean*, a shipment of fat pine to be distributed at certain points above New Orleans, and to be used as fuel by Captain Leathers' boat on her way up. On the other hand, the *Lee's* preparation for the contest was most thorough and far-seeing. In addition to an immense cargo of pine knots shipped to various points along the river by the steamer *Frank Pargaud*, the *Pargaud* to act as tender to the *Lee* in its delivery, she had also a large supply of spoiled fat bacon, rosin and pitch, tallow candles and other combustibles for use as stimulants to her boilers; and it was charged that her speed was considerably accelerated by the *Pargaud's* power, and its supplying the *Lee* with coal while under way. To this may be added the fact that the *Lee* was stripped of her spars and dunnage; and portions of her guards abaft the

wheelhouses were cut away to prevent dead water and air resistance.

"Captain Cannon refused all business of every kind, positively declining to receive passengers, deck or cabin. His opponent, Captain Leathers, took on several tons of freight, his passenger list amounting to some four thousand dollars in fares. Captain Cannon was reported as remarking that the *Lee* would go up the river as fast as her engines were capable of driving her, and if the *Natchez* would follow her, Captain Leathers would have reason to believe that the *Lee* was twelve hundred miles long before he passed her.

"At one minute of 5 o'clock in the afternoon of June 30, 1870, the *Robert E. Lee* backed out from the Canal Street wharf of New Orleans, and rounding to, fired her gun just abreast of the ships moored at the wharves of the First District. The *Natchez*, firing her gun, followed four minutes later. The *Lee* passed Carrollton at 5.31, and the *Natchez* at 5.35 P.M. Ten-Mile Point was reached by the *Lee* at 5.40½, and her competitor at 5.44. Elkhorn Place, seventeen miles above New Orleans, was passed by the *Lee* at 6.10; at Twenty-one-Mile Point she was reported by a tug as being four minutes and forty seconds ahead of her rival; and the *Frank Pargaud* telegraphed at Twenty-four-Mile Point that the same difference between the racers still existed.

"Departure of the boats, instead of diminishing, increased the excitement in New Orleans, a condition

which continued for several days during and following the event itself. Women as well as men wagered with reckless loyalty on their choice, never flinching whether it happened to be the *Lee* or the *Natchez*. But, as has been said, the *Lee* was evidently the favorite, except with the sporting fraternity, who were noticeably very decidedly of the opinion that the *Natchez* was the better boat. As to the relative merits of the two, it was contended that while the *Lee* was very broad at the bow and rather ungainly looking, the *Natchez* was sharp as a hatchet, and that while the former seemed to push herself through the water by main force, the latter cut through it like a knife, gliding along with the ease and grace of a swan.

"An effort was made to prove that although the *Lee* seemed to push herself through the water, she had an advantage over the *Natchez*, by which the displacement of water was accomplished at the bow, thus leaving the boat to run in smooth water, while her adversary, owing to her unusual sharpness at the bow, caught the water amidships, thus losing a considerable degree of power. And again, it was the opinion of others that neither boat was developing the speed its engine power, under different conditions, would be capable of doing, if a 'patent vortex skimmer,' for removing the sediment from the water of the boiler and purifying the steam, had been installed in the engine rooms.

"Long after midnight hundreds of people, including many visitors, congregated at Johnny Hawkins'

saloon, at the corner of Common Street and Varieties Alley, anxiously awaiting news from Baton Rouge. Finally a telegram was received from that town conveying the information that the *Lee* had passed there at 1.28 A.M., and the *Natchez* at 1.38 A.M. Hawkins had the bar privileges on the *Natchez*, and besides was noted in sporting circles throughout the country. The time of the *Princess* to Natchez in 1855 was eighteen hours and fifty-three minutes, until then beaten only by the *Natchez*, the fifth boat of that name, she making the record in seventeen hours and thirty minutes, in the same year. Again, this record was surpassed by the sixth *Natchez*, and still later by the *Lee* in her race with the former in 1870, time: seventeen hours and eleven minutes.

"As the *Lee* passed the town of Natchez, Captain Cannon cried out to the wharfmaster from the hurricane roof of his boat:

" 'Take down those horns!'

"The request was promptly complied with, much to the chagrin of the friends of the boat that bore the name of the town. The horns had been conspicuously displayed on the roof of the wharfboat for several years. Although in her contest with the *Lee* the *Natchez* had lost eight minutes in making a landing at the town of Natchez, the opinion was fast gaining credence, among sportsmen, that she was gradually lessening the distance between herself and the *Lee*. The friends of the latter, however, contended that she would gain three minutes on every hundred

miles above Vicksburg, thus beating the *Natchez* half an hour to Cairo.

"The *Lee's* time to Vicksburg was twenty-four hours and thirty-eight minutes, according to expert calculations, sixteen minutes ahead of the *Natchez*. At Memphis the *Lee* was reported as arriving at 11.10 P.M., and the *Natchez* at 12.12 P.M.

"At Memphis the population turned out *en masse* to give greeting to the racers. So great was the interest manifested that business was suspended in that city, and the Mississippi river, for miles, was alive with steamboats and every other conceivable sort of craft, conveying excursion parties to meet the rival steamers. Prominent among the hotel arrivals were the names of two hundred leading merchants of St. Louis, who had arrived during the day to get the first glimpse of the racers, and if possible to return home on one of them. During the night betting was very heavy, with the *Lee* leading.

"There was much amusement over a mistake made by the crowd in identifying the *Thompson Dean* as one of the racers, the *Dean* being given a most vociferous ovation as she came in view from a bend in the river below the city. But this misplaced greeting, as well as the embarrassment that followed, was not without its extenuating circumstances, the *Dean's* peculiar conduct in the premises having left nothing undone to invite to itself the honors that should have gone to others.

"Had the *Dean* not blown her whistle in the noisi-



THE FAMOUS RACE BETWEEN THE "NATCHEZ" AND THE "ROBERT E. LEE"

est possible manner, had she not fired her gun with incessant repetition, and otherwise demeaned herself in the most provocative way to create the impression that she was the victor, the booming of cannon, the plenteous discharge of fire rockets and Roman candles, and the shouts of the multitude would not have been hers; but would have gone first to the *Lee* and then to the *Natchez* in the order in which they arrived a little later—arrived when the Memphis powder magazines were exhausted, when the stock of skyrockets and Roman candles were gone, and the voice of the multitude, hoarse and weakened from a strenuous vociferation of more than an hour, could not have been heard, as one indignant citizen expressed it, further than you could throw a bull by the tail.

"In the betting, odds of from ten minutes to an hour were given on the *Lee*, and telegrams received from all parts of the country indicated lively betting everywhere, including the London, Paris, Vienna and other European exchanges. Large sums were being wagered on the result, and mostly in favor of the *Lee*. In New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Rochester, St. Paul and St. Louis, it was said more attention was given to the race bulletin boards on 'Change and at the newspaper offices than to business during the three days of the race. In Louisville, the *Courier-Journal* reported that the people were as excited over the race as they had been over the contests of Henry Clay for the presidency. Both Captains were natives

of Kentucky, but neither their friends nor their enemies gave or asked for quarter. Win or lose, sink or swim, was the motto of both—'Blücher or night,' *Lee* against *Natchez*, Leathers against Cannon!

. . . . . .

"The writer was a boy when the race between the *Lee* and the *Natchez* took place, and he recalls with a most vivid recollection that part of the race between Memphis and Cairo, as the boats were hastening to their goal. He was a passenger aboard the steamboat *Julia*, Captain Blake, with ten other boys and half as many girls, hurrying home from school on vacation. When the *Julia* landed at Cairo, an immense crowd had congregated along the levee, and Captain Blake, in explanation of the excitement, was told by the wharfmaster that the *Lee* was ahead of the *Natchez*, and that her arrival was expected some time during the night or next morning.

"Several of the boys, myself included, decided to remain up until they saw the boats pass, which was a little after daybreak the following morning. The banks on both sides of the river from Cairo down were lighted by great bonfires, pine torches, etc., and in many places tents had been put up for the accommodation of those who, like ourselves, were evidently determined to see the race regardless of time or the discomfitures and inconveniences attending it. The occupants of these tents were made up of men, women and children, the majority appearing to be in good circumstances, and very enthusiastic—shouts from

the Illinois side acclaiming the *Natchez*, while over in Missouri the demonstration was all in favor of the *Lee*.

"About five o'clock, away down the river could be plainly seen, through the early morning mist, a dense cloud of black smoke rising slowly above the horizon. Captain Blake was positive that the smoke came from one of the racers, and that we should know which of the two it was when the boat cleared the bend then screening her from view. After the lapse of more than three-quarters of an hour, the Lee was the first to come in sight. She was bulging along at a great rate, and as she came nearer, looked as if she had been struck by a cyclone. The doors and windows of her cabin had been removed, her sheathing torn away, her dunnage disposed of, her wheelhouses were conspicuous for their absence, and nothing was left that might in any way tend to impede her progress through the water. The *Lee* was not a graceful runner. Her bow buried itself in the water, throwing a terrific swell, and she labored as she went.

"A little later the *Natchez* made her appearance, looking as graceful and bewitching as a bride on her wedding day, skimming over the water like a thing of life. The beauty of her lines, the grace and ease with which she moved, challenged the admiration and applause of all on board the *Julia*. So smooth was her passage that not a break was noticeable, except just forward of her wheelhouses. She looked a sure winner, and although she was then considerably behind

the *Lee*, experienced boatmen expressed the opinion that she was traveling at a much faster rate and that if properly handled she would win. A remarkable feature was a diminutive stream of water that shot up the bow of the boat, and thence up the jack staff some thirty feet, when it fell back gracefully into the river, as though it were forced upward through a fountain. It might be added that the *Natchez* was intact—nothing had been removed that her builders might deem essential, either as to her efficiency as a steamboat or to her beauty.

"In a long stretch of clear, straight river both racers were plainly in sight of the watchers; then a bend intervened, and one of the boats was lost to view, all but the great cloud of black smoke which hung heavily away in the distance, or perhaps, an island or a sudden projection of woodland, hid all traces of one or the other for the time being. The special correspondent of the *Picayune*, writing from aboard the *Natchez*, said: 'The scene from the time of departure till dark last evening baffles description. As we steamed along the watery track, the whole country on both sides of the river seemed alive with a strange excitement, expressed in a variety of gestures, the waving of handkerchiefs and hats, and running along the shore as if to encourage the panting steamer; and now and then far-off shouts came cheeringly over the waters, and were plainly heard above the roaring of the fires, the clatter of the machinery, the splashing of the water, and the escape of steam.'

"Cairo reached in three days and one hour, only a few more hours and the race of the century would take its place among the things that were. A little before noon of the Fourth the *Robert E. Lee's* loud-mouthed gun and familiar whistle reverberated along the picturesque Missouri hills—crowded as they had never been before to greet the champion of all champions in the greatest race that had ever been run on the Father of Waters. At 11.25 A.M. the *Lee* had accomplished her remarkable feat—accomplished it in three days, eighteen hours and fourteen minutes.

"The whole of St. Louis had turned out to welcome the victor; business was forgotten, and the wildest enthusiasm prevailed. Shouts and yells went up with the waving of flags and handkerchiefs and tossing of hats. The multitude followed the boat up the levee, where there was a scene of wildest confusion—men, women and children hurrying along as on a chase to the boat, baggage wagons and hotel coaches dashing through the crowd. Slowly the victor backed about and gracefully moved downstream, then rounded to again, coming alongside a wharfboat, to which she was made fast. A grand rush on board followed, nearly causing her to capsize, and the friends of the officers grasped hands and tendered congratulations. Several excursion boats had met the *Lee* five or six miles below town, and amid the blowing of whistles, the ringing of bells, the tooting of horns, escorted her to the city.

"'Nothing was ever seen in the history of this

city,' said the St. Louis *Times*, 'comparable to this reception.'

"At Cairo the *Natchez* was behind the *Lee* one hour and forty minutes. Further up the river she went to the bank with a defective steam pipe, which required some time to repair, so that upon reaching Grand Tower she was emersed in a fog, which detained her there for six hours. Consequently she did not reach St. Louis until 6 P.M. on July 4th. Her time to St. Louis, allowing for lost time in repair of machinery and in fog, was three days, twenty-one hours and fifty-eight minutes.

"Captain Leathers, on the other hand, deducting the hours the *Natchez* was laid up in the fog and for repairs of machinery, contended that his boat beat the *Lee's* time some twenty minutes. The popular verdict, however, was against Captain Leathers and his boat. All bets were recognized and paid by the loser except those contracted in Europe, London and Paris particularly declaring all bets off, alleging that the stripping of the *Lee* for the race, the removal of structural material and the use of the *Pargaud* in providing her with coal under way, were in violation of rules governing such events. The losers also criticized the *Lee* for having coal fleets awaiting her in the middle of the river at given points, to be taken in tow until the coal could be transferred to the decks of the *Lee*, when they were cut loose to float back.

"The St. Louis *Republican* published a dispatch

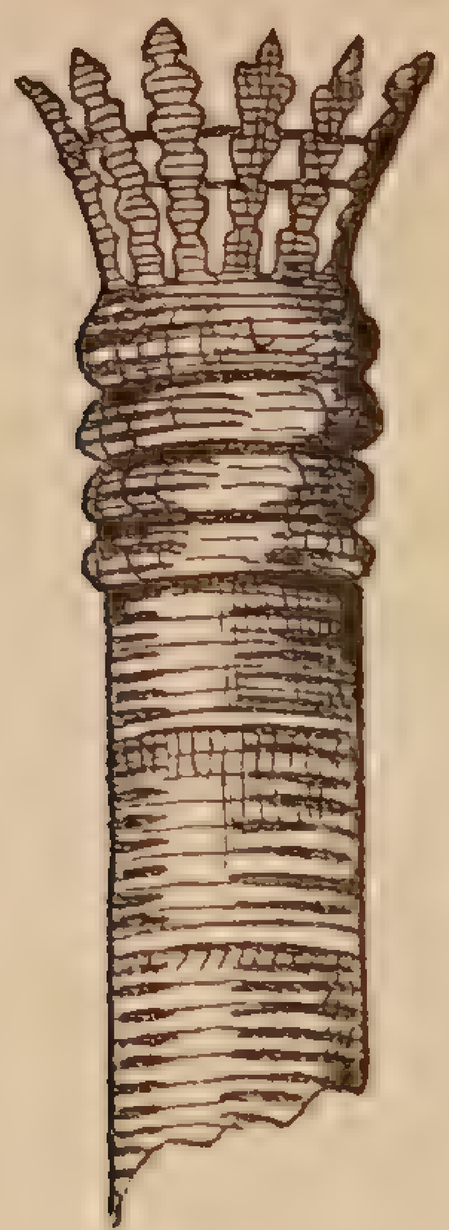
from Cincinnati that the people of that city who had bet on the time of the *Natchez* to Cairo claimed their bets off, as neither boat had come within two miles of the town. The general understanding at both Cincinnati and Louisville was that the race would end at Cairo, but that cut no figure in the final result, for the reason that the *Lee* was ahead at Cairo as well as at St. Louis.

"The captains of both boats were given a reception and banquet at a St. Louis hotel, and many distinguished men attended. Handsome medals were given each captain.

"The only persons on the *Lee*, other than the officers and crew, were several invited guests, among whom were the following: Captain John W. Tobin, Captain Smoker, Captain L. Kouns, Former Governor H. C. Warmouth, Dr. A. W. Smyth, E. Miltonberger, and Robert Adams, of New Orleans; Captain H. S. Parrisot, Captain E. C. Carroll, Captain Charles M. Kain, William McCutcheon and D. W. Lankin of Vicksburg. Of all of those so intimately connected with this event, and who were guests of Captain Cannon on the voyage, but one survives, Former Governor Warmouth, now in his eightieth year, but still vigorous and alert.

"Large-size lithographs purporting to represent the *Lee* and *Natchez* in this race, like the one circulated many years before in connection with the contest between the *Eclipse* and the *Shotwell*, bore not the

slightest resemblance to the contestants of 1870, for the boats were rarely in sight of each other during the race, although in the picture they were represented as being almost abreast. A few of these still exist."



CHAPTER IV

LEATHERS, CANNON, TOBIN AND THE *J. M. WHITE*

FREQUENTLY they spoke of him on the Rivers as Old Chief Pushmataha.

Fierce, deep-voiced, implacable in his dislikes, kindly in his dealings with those who had no occasion to oppose his will, standing a good six foot three without his boots, regarding the world from under shaggy brows, grown old and wealthy in the steamboat business. . . . Any day you might have seen him in New Orleans on the streets, in the exchange, the clubs or hotels, but most likely on the levee where the steamboats docked—Captain Thomas P. Leathers. He was, like his most active opponent and rival, Captain John Cannon, a Kentuckian by birth; and like him, also, it was his boast that he brought to New Orleans, whence he came while still in his teens, the Kentuckians' love for blooded stock. His blooded stock, however, were steamboats—not horses.

The reason for his nickname was simply that he built and ran many steamboats by the name of *Natchez*. Pushmataha, you may or may not recall, was chief of the Natchez Indian tribe. Painted on the huge wheelhouse of *Natchez VII*, the last side-

wheeler of the name (burned in 1889), was a likeness of the grand old Indian chief himself, the real Pushmataha, in full war paint. If there was a fight on—a rate war or a race—between Captain Leathers and any of his rival steamboatmen (and it was nearly always Leathers against the field) the Indian on the wheelhouse had his tomahawk upraised belligerently. Otherwise it was painted out.

But pretty generally the tomahawk was there and raised up to show that Pushmataha was on the war-path again.

"Captain Leathers," Billy Duke told me, "was one of those men who would do anything in the world for you, or for any of the passengers on his boats—just so long as you weren't running a steamboat in opposition to him. He detested rivalry. He just naturally hated to have another steamboat beat him.

"He had very good grounds for believing his boats the fastest. Certainly they were among the finest that ever plied the Western Rivers, north or south. 'Way back yonder before the war, while Captain Leathers was still a young man, he built and ran several boats named *Princess*. The third *Princess* made a record in 1855 on the run to Natchez, Mississippi, from New Orleans and held it for a number of years. Later Leathers bettered his own boat's record with his *Natchez* and held it until one of Captain Cannon's boats, the first *Robert E. Lee* beat it. Then Captain Cannon took a big pair of buck horns and nailed 'em on the wharfboat at Natchez on a wooden

shield. He wrote in between the horns: 'This is the *Lee's* time. Beat it, and take the horns!'

"Deerhorns, you know, were always the mark of the fastest boat out of any port. Well, when Captain Leathers saw that, it got his dander up, you can pretty well reckon. And on the next trip, he *did* beat the *Lee's* time by a fair margin. Then he sat down and wrote to Captain Cannon: 'I'll thank you for those horns!' Of course, Captain Cannon sent 'em over right away by his chief clerk, one of the most important officers on the boat.

"But not very long after that the *Lee* beat the *Natchez'* time again, and Captain Cannon sent back to Leathers for the horns. Lawsy, how that did hurt the Old Chief!

"Oh, yes, he sent 'em over all right, but sent 'em by a nigger roustabout!"

Captain Duke, who told me this incident, was mate on the last *Natchez*, later commanded boats of his own and now at the ripe age of seventy-five represents a certain Louisiana district in the state Legislature.

For a long time it was undecided which was the fastest boat on the rivers—the *Lee* or the *Natchez*. Even the famous big race of 1870 from New Orleans up the river to St. Louis did not in the opinion of many decide anything definite save that Captain Cannon was a shrewder sportsman than Captain Leathers. That Captain Cannon's *Lee* had beat Captain Leather's *Natchez* proved not necessarily that she

was the faster boat all around. But about the time the racers, *Natchez* and *Lee*, went out of commission, following ten years' hard service as cotton carriers and money mints for their owners, another boat put in an appearance on the lower Mississippi, and no doubt remained as to which was the champion speedster. The *Lee* and the *Natchez* were not, so to speak, in it with her. Moreover in the matter of sheer beauty there are thousands of competent judges who say that this boat had no peer. Very few steamboats have been built larger.

She was the *J. M. White III*, built by the Howards for Captain John Tobin (another steamboat magnate of New Orleans who had refused seductive offers from the Federals during the war, to give the services of his boats to the Confederate Navy) to ply in that same paying trade between Vicksburg and the Bends, out of New Orleans.

And a worthy successor she was to that other *J. M. White*—the Old *White* of 1844 which had startled the world in her swift trips between St. Louis and New Orleans. No one ever knew just how fast the new *White* could go. Engineers seemed to fear to open her up full speed as she might with her gigantic wheels sweep all the water out of the river. But, no doubt existed that the time she did make was far, far greater than that made by any boat before or since.

"Eve'y time de *White's* wheel tu'n roun'—*Whoof!* Five dollars"—was the roustabout's way of saying

that no expense was spared upon her building or operation.

Captain Tobin sent Charley Smith, his chief engineer, to the Howard plant in Jeffersonville in 1878 to install the new boat's machinery. For this machinery alone Captain Tobin paid the unprecedented sum of $50,000—enough in that day and time to build two or three pretty good steamboats complete. Ainslee and Cochrane were the engine builders: cylinder forty-three inches in diameter, an eleven foot piston stroke. Her boilers (there were ten of them) built of heavy black diamond steel, measured thirty-four feet in length and forty-two inches in diameter (smaller in diameter than her cylinders!). Each boiler had two large flues. The shafts came from a foundry in Buffalo, New York, and weighed twenty-eight thousand seven hundred and forty-five pounds each, without the cranks, which themselves weighed four-and-a-half tons each. There were eight flanges weighing two tons each. She had two unconnected engines, of course, and each of them represented sixteen hundred horse power and circulated one hundred and twenty pounds pressure in the cylinders.

Had you rolled one of the *White's* mammoth side wheels alongside a house it would have reached up nearly to the fourth floor. The hub lacked four inches of being a yard in diameter. Steam capstans, one fore and one aft, were each driven by separate double engines. Her stage plank was sixty feet long

and seven feet wide. Her derrick pole rose sixty-eight feet in the air and was twenty inches in diameter; while its booms, fourteen inches thick, reached out fifty-five feet.

From the top of her jackstaff, ninety-three feet in the air, a little pennon fluttered gaily even as she lay in her unfinished state at the Ohio's muddy bank at Jeffersonville when Charley Smith arrived from New Orleans to install her machinery.

"The *White* was contracted for June 12, 1877," says J. E. Howard, present head of the Howard Shipyards. "My father laid down her keel September 15th. Her first frames were raised September 18th. The following April 3rd he launched her at four o'clock in the afternoon. I don't know why, but river men always launched boats at four in the afternoon; and never was a boat launched on Friday in the old days! This must have been a superstition of long standing. We have abandoned the custom. But up until a few years ago, it obtained.

"We tested the *White's* boilers on June 24th, turned over her wheels for the first time on June 25th, and she went South on the following day—June 26th, 1878."

To Charles Smith, engineer, sent up by Captain John Tobin, she seemed the most elegant steamboat that ever floated. And for a very good reason. She was.

Coming from New Orleans and having served as engineer on the *Natchez*, with her classic cabin sur-

rounded by stained glass sky lights on every one of which was the similitude of a Natchez Indian; having been accustomed to such boats as the *Lee*, the *Katie* (afterwards the *Ed Richardson*, a giant), the *Grand Republic* (whose cabin was the glory of her owner in St. Louis), Smith might not have been greatly awed had not the new boat impressed him, immediately he clapped his eye on her, as the high-water mark of all steamboat-building endeavor.

She was not just another steamboat—not even just another *fine* steamboat. She was the *grand dame*, the haughty dowager, the graceful and gracious queen of all steamboats, before or since. And she moved with a true royal dignity. For years she was the standard to which all other steamboat builders aspired.

Seventy-five feet in the air rose her smokestacks. A man could walk through them from end to end. The lacy feathers at the top of those stacks stood eight feet tall. No bridges spanned the Mississippi in those days to prevent the use of tall chimneys which give the benefit of a natural draft. The *sheer* of her cabin was such that it imparted to her just the correct pitch—the proper "set," and a most graceful and becoming look of grandeur. Her name, on the giant wheelhouses, was done not in the customary black paint against the white background, but in gold leaf—an adornment said to have been more beautiful even than the *Grand Republic's* artistic painting of a river sunset scene on the wheelhouse.

As you boarded her on the forecastle, you looked back through a high, spacious room to the roaring furnaces and boilers. Her cotton guards, extending twenty feet beyond a line flush with her hull on either side gave added roominess and solidity, making a total width of ninety-eight feet. The wide flight of stairs that led to the boiler deck was plated on each step with heavy brass. Three hundred dancers could easily have waltzed to the tune of the Beautiful Blue Danube on the wide forward deck. Entering the cabin one's wonder increased: for in the upholstery and decoration there had been a radical departure from the mere recurring and monotonous gilt-and-white that marked the cabins of many of the boats. The *White's* ceiling was done in natural cherry. Twelve ponderous chandeliers with ornate candelabra swung on mighty iron rings, heavily gold leafed, down the centre of the saloon for a distance of two hundred and sixty feet. That cabin was nineteen feet wide and sixteen feet high. Large staterooms, ten or twelve by fourteen feet, with hand-painted doors and glass knobs, added another impression of luxury.

Her saloon carpet, made of one solid piece, had been woven especially in Europe. On either side from end to end, extended a long line of columns which provided ample promenades immediately in front of the stateroom doors.

All the furniture was individual—a heavy walnut with an inlay of contrasting lighter-colored wood forming the boat's initials and a holly wreath. Her

STR. "ED. RICHARDSON."

DINNER.

For 1879

SOUP.

FISH.

Broiled Red Fish, au maitre d'hote.

BOILED.

Leg of Mutton, Caper Sauce — Ham — Corned Beef and Cabbage
Chicken, Egg Sauce — Fulton Market Beef

ROAST.

Loin of Beef — Pork — Chicken
Saddle of Mutton — Turkey

VEGETABLES.

Mashed Potatoes — Rice — Cabbage — Hominy
Turnips — Snap Beans — Green Corn

RELISHES.

Crosse & Blackwell's Pickles

Gherkins — Currant Jelly — Cheese
Tomato Catsup — Walnut Catsup — Chow-Chow
Piccalilli — English Onions — Mushroom Catsup
The Lea & Perrin Sauces — Spanish Olives — Cold Slaugh
Maunsel White — Lettuce — John Bull's Sauce
Horse Radish — French Mustard

ENTREES.

Calves' feet a la Puceline — Pieds de Veau a la Puceline
Filets of Chicken with Truffes — Filets de Poulets aux Truffes
Braised Brisket of Lamb with Green Peas
Poitrine d'Agneau au Brasier avec Pois Verts

GAME.

COLD DISHES.

Corned Beef — Tongue — Ham — Salad

A reproduction of the menu served on the New Orleans, Natchez, Cannon was commander and T. J. Howard clerk. The passengers

PASTRY AND DESSERT.

PUDDINGS.

White Raisin, a la Windsor, Vanilla Sauce

PASTRY.

Lemon Pie — Green Apple Pie

Petite Puit d'Amour — Fachennottes, a la Flour de Orange

CAKES.

Pound — Fruit — Almond — Jelly Cake

Lady Fingers — Cocoanut Plarine

CREAMS AND JELLIES.

Jelly de Macedonia — Maraschino Jelly

Meringue aux Peche — Cream a la Roman

Belle Fritters

FRUITS.

Pecans — Figs — Almonds

Pine Apples — Raisins

Brazilian Nuts — Filberts

English Walnuts — Fresh Dates

Oranges — Bananas — Apples — Prunes

—COFFEE.—

☞ *Any want of attention on the part of attendants, please report to the STEWARD.*

Seymour & Stevens, Print, 96 Common St.

Vicksburg and Memphis packet, *Ed. Richardson*, of which John W. were expected to eat their way straight through.

doors, also walnut, had a curly walnut veneer panel. Numerous deeply cushioned sofas were scattered about throughout the cabin. The upholstery was velvet with a large flowered design.

At the rear of the cabin a giant silver water cooler stood—deeply engraved, massive and imposing. Attached thereto were eighteen heavy silver cups—each fastened by a chain. Mr. John Tobin of New Orleans, son of Captain Tobin, who was then a youngster of some thirteen years and who went up with his father to Jeffersonville to bring the big steamboat down to the Crescent City, told me that the *White's* napery was of the finest monogrammed linen. Her silver service bore the distinctive mark of Reed and Barton. Her china, specially designed with the boat's picture and monogram, left nothing to be desired for finery; and the epicurean feasts that made up each meal aboard her cannot to this day be spoken of without the smacking of lips and a wistful expression in the eyes.

Like all other big boats she had a barber shop and a magnificent bar.

The *White* possessed other unusual features. Above her main saloon cabin was another, though somewhat smaller cabin—a hall one hundred and eighty feet long and furnished in the same style as her main saloon. At the rear end of the upper cabin were certain separated cabins known as "The Freedmen's Bureau"—where the high-steppin' negroes held sway. For there were many negroes in the

'Eighties who were beginning to put on "dog" and considered traveling deck passage—the hitherto special prerogative of their race—rather beneath them. In the Freedmen's Bureau the food was excellent; they had their own waiters, porters, orchestra. And a good time, in that section of the boat—during her entire career as a famous river carrier—was certain to have been had by all.

The *White* arrived at New Orleans and tied up on the Algiers side of the river opposite Jackson Avenue. Captain Tobin, sick with yellow fever during that summer of 1878 when people in the city were dying off like cattle, brought his entire family aboard the new boat and they lived there while she was undergoing her finishing touches.

Convalescent, but still despondent, Captain Tobin walked up to Charley Smith puttering around in the engine room, and after looking things over, remarked:

"Charley, I'm afraid she's a little *too* fine. I've put a quarter of a million into this steamboat. I'm wondering if she'll pay me."

"Why, Captain, she'll be the biggest money maker of all the sixty-odd boats you've commanded," Smith replied. "These Bends planters and the New Orleans people are goin' to take to her like ducks to water."

CHAPTER V

MORE RACING AND "OFF-SHORE HOSPITALITY"

MEANWHILE in New Orleans the fight went on between Leathers and Cannon to get the rich cotton planters' and sugar men's business. A number of the largest boats left each week for Vicksburg and Greenville, among them Cannon's *Robert E. Lee II* and Leathers' new *Natchez* into which he had put the machinery of his famous old racer of the same name.

Five o'clock was leaving time always. Captain Leathers' *Natchez* left Saturday evening—the Old Chief was sure to choose that time in order to get the cream of the week-end trade.

Leathers was making himself unpopular. Every improvement, every change that Cannon or Tobin or any of the other steamboat operators made in their boats or schedule, Leathers duplicated. He cut his rates to the bone to take the business. He did all in his power to humiliate his adversaries.

As an illustration. The *Ed Richardson*, a mighty boat with such powerful engines that her engineer was afraid ever to slap on full speed for fear the engines would walk off and leave her, was owned jointly by Tobin and Cannon. Leaving New Orleans at five

o'clock each Saturday evening she would be in Vicksburg the following Tuesday morning, having made a score or more stops. There she would load up with cotton and passengers and come booming down to the big town once more. Such was the practice of all the boats, though on different days. The *Richardson*, while a fast boat and a good one, could not stand up to Captain Leathers' *Natchez*. This the Old Chief knew and made the most of it. He had a favorite trick of pulling out from New Orleans just five minutes after the *Richardson* (or whoever his rival happened to be), of catching up with her and passing her before reaching Carrollton, six miles up the river—much to the delight of his own passengers and the chagrin of the passengers on the rival boat.

On one occasion, when the *Richardson* drew away from New Orleans wharf and, closely following her, the *Natchez* came booming along bent on overtaking her, Captain Leathers himself stood on the hurricane deck clad as usual in his long tailored coat, his ruffled shirt fastened with gold pins held together with a little chain.

The *Natchez* had on board a small gun used for firing signals. As she drew abreast the *Richardson*, Leathers fired this gun across his rival's stern. Insult of insults!

Then, forging gradually ahead, he fired again across the *Richardson's* bow! And—this is talked about among river men—Old Chief Pushmataha

stood there on the deck with a contemptuous wriggling of his thumb at his nose as he passed by!

Now it happened that Captain Tobin was aboard the *Richardson* on that trip. Seeing Leathers as the *Natchez* roared past, and hearing the boom of that derisive little gun the Old Chief had fired, he picked up a megaphone and shouted:

"Go on, you old blackguard! I'll have a boat in this trade next week you won't fire any guns across!"

And he did. Next week the *Natchez* drew out into New Orleans harbor at the same moment as her new rival the *J. M. White*—a boat known to be fast, but not *how* fast. With his usual cocksureness the Old Chief sped up to pass his antagonist. And for a little while it looked as though the odds were all with him. For just about the time the two snorting, magnificent racers came abreast Carrollton Gardens, one of the *White's* cables broke and let her landing stage fall into the river. Some fifteen minutes were lost in retrieving this. Meantime the *Natchez* had plunged ahead and was disappearing around the bend.

Captain Tobin on the *White* seeing this, went below and had a little chat with Charley Smith, his engineer. And then the *White* let loose! And such time as she made! Ten miles farther she had caught up with the *Natchez*. In a few moments she had passed. In twenty more she had lost sight of her.

Pilot Billy Neihysel of New Orleans, then a steersman on the *White* and now engaged in piloting Stand-

ard Oil ships from the passes to Baton Rouge, chuckled:

"That was the fastest run ever made out of New Orleans. It was five o'clock when the *White* left New Orleans. She made twelve business stops for freight and passengers and the midnight watch was being changed as we steamed out of Baton Rouge. One hundred and thirty-five miles in seven hours! And at those landings we stopped long enough to attend to all business."

Billy Duke happened to be mate on the *Natchez* at the time of that fast run of the *White*.

"Was old Captain Leathers mad?" he repeated in answer to a query of mine. "*Was* he? He was! I was below, watching the river from the stern and I suddenly saw a white flashing in the sky behind us. I knew then that the *White* was gaining on us; she was using her new-fangled electric searchlight. She was the first steamboat on the river to use an electric searchlight. When I saw she was catching up with us I went up on the hurricane deck. Old Chief was standing there swearing under his breath.

" 'She's gaining on us, Duke,' he ground out between his teeth. And a few minutes later:

" 'She's gaining all right! But I'm damned if I'm going to let that blankety-blankety-blank-blank pass me in the channel!' "

So Captain Leathers resorted to an old trick: the fake landing. Just before the conquering *White* drew up, the *Natchez* pilot blew the whistle and turned

suddenly into shore as though answering a hail. Out flashed the stage plank and landed in the mud. A nigger rouster skedaddled ashore, spinning a barrel along the plank and left it.

The barrel was empty; but it saved Leathers the chagrin of having a rival pass him in a race.

Between Leathers and Cannon there was no love lost. They hated each other with what was known as a holy hatred, but for my part, I can see little holiness about it. They had a mutual friend at one of the landings in Southern Mississippi who had the confidence of each. When he traveled on the *Lee* he gave Cannon the news of Leathers. When he saw Leathers, he kept him informed as to the general activities of Cannon.

Once this man told Cannon that Leathers was laid up with a carbuncle on his neck.

"Carbuncle, hey?" returned Cannon with satisfaction. "You tell him, next time you see the old scoundrel, that I had an aunt who died of a carbuncle just like that."

Later the mutual friend brought Leathers the news that Cannon was suffering from fever-and-ague.

"Just what my Grandfather died of, and it was along about this time of year, too! And I wish you'd tell that old mealy-mouthed, egg-sucking, this-and-that and thus-and-so!" Leathers' picturesque vocabulary was one of the seven wonders of the Mississippi Valley.

These days of the 'Seventies, 'Eighties and early 'Nineties were really the golden days of steamboating on the Lower River. And there yet remained a diminishing business in the trade from the Ohio and its tributaries. Still the railroads were slow in coming to the Valley of the great river; still the cotton grew and the families flourished and wealth was to be had. Planters and their families lived aboard the big steamboats for weeks at a time, reserving their staterooms or suites as one would reserve accommodations in modern hotels.

Many times they were guests of the captain, who, though on the surface he was displaying a lavish and openhanded hospitality, knew which side his bread was buttered on. The peculiar temperament of the people, the needs of the times and place, he knew from *a* to *z*. Business was done on what has been well called a friendship basis. The steamboat captain who put forth the most elaborate display of hospitality, who was the politest, the most diplomatic, the most gallant, nearly always got the business. On some two or three boats, the captains had all the business they could handle; they could afford to be choosey and could take the freight and passengers they wanted and leave the rest. Captain Leathers summed it all up by saying (with an exclamation point):

"What's the use of being a steamboat captain if you can't tell people to go to hell?"

He tried that once too often. A general store in Southern Mississippi belonging to the firm of Lamkin

and Eggleston had freight for New Orleans which Leathers saw fit to pass up. They sued him in circuit court and got judgment. Now thoroughly roused, he carried it to the supreme court, but there he was again defeated. He had to plunk down two thousand five hundred dollars. How it hurt the Old Chief!

But for the most part the steamboat people courted the favor of their patrons—especially of the big shippers. Their elaborate menus illustrate this.

"The *White's* bill for fruit and nuts alone was seven hundred dollars every week of the world," Captain Neihysel told me. "Captain Tobin had given instructions to his steward to feed the people the best of everything and all they wanted. You boarded the boat (and this was true of all the big steamboats), and paid your fare to Vicksburg or Greenville or Memphis or St. Louis or Cincinnati and you had all you could possibly eat and the best. The big steamboat owners maintained their own stock and dairy farms just as they had their own coal- and woodyards and ice plants. If a steward failed to give the passengers the best and it got to the captain's ears, that steward would likely lose his job. The owner's orders were simply: 'Give 'em whatever they want.' "

One cause for such enormous expenditures for food was the "river bank hospitality" which all steamboat owners extended. In plain English this simply meant the delicacies the steamboat captains felt it necessary to hand out at each landing. Let a big steam-

boat draw in at a landing on the Lower River and a big crowd would be there to greet it. The moment the stageplank hit the bank—*kerplunk!* a white-aproned grinning negro would come hastening down the gangway bearing on his uplifted palm a tray of all kinds of good things to eat. The farmers and planters and their wives, no less than some of the humbler denizens of that country, came in for a share of the boat's hospitality. Nuts, ices, bunches of grapes, celery, pineapples, oranges; a choice roast of beef, a big red snapper—all for the delectation of the patrons or potential patrons of the boat.

"Wid de compliments of de Cap'n, Missy!" It became a trite saying along the river.

And while the women folk and children were helping themselves, the gentlemen on shore would come on board—while the boat was loading—to crack a glass with the Captain.

Oh, there was a reason for it all right! These people's patronage amounted to many thousands of dollars a week. That weather-beaten old fellow and his wife own a huge plantation that produces thousands of bales of cotton! That young chap with the high-bred well-tanned face, who is just now in a conversation with the Captain, is clearing out a big lumber tract to ship the timber to market at New Orleans. And there would be many, many things both needed when the boat returned.

The large steamboats carried the accounts of their patrons. They acted as agents for New Orleans and

Memphis merchants and for the country storekeepers and planters. Their *modus operandi*, explained to me by Mr. W. O. Menger of Vicksburg, a man who could love a steamboat with a positive passion, was nothing if not simple.

"Merchant or planter at some river landing hails a passing steamboat.

" 'Hello, Cap!' he calls when the stageplanks has been lowered. Captain strolls genially over to the rail.

" 'Morning, Mr. Brown! What can I do for you?'

"Brown tells him. 'When you come back I wish you'd bring me ten kegs ten-penny nails; ten kegs twelve-penny nails; ten kegs mule shoes; and about twenty-five thousand feet two by four planed oak scantlings.

" 'Certainly, Mr. Brown.' The Captain summons his clerk who puts down the order. The boat backs away and stands off for New Orleans or Memphis—whichever port she headed for.

"Now so far as Brown is concerned that order is all taken care of. It's off his shoulders. He's turned it over to the steamboat people he knows and trusts. When that boat arrives in town the clerk sends out the orders to the various merchants handling the goods required. Then he assembles the order. The goods, mind you, are charged to the steamboat. And when they are delivered to the man up in the country, the captain collects the amount of the bill, plus the freight which he keeps, and turns it over to the mer-

chants in town. Steamboats have been known to carry accounts for planters and country merchants for months at a time.

"That practice wasn't the exception, it was the rule."

All this exertion on the part of the steamboat people accomplished the purpose which it was intended that it should accomplish. It made for a friendly and sociable feeling between themselves and their patrons or potential patrons. And then, when there was a little matter of fifteen or twenty thousand bales of cotton to be carried at one dollar and twenty-five cents a bale down to New Orleans for market the captain who was on the best terms with the planter got the business. Besides, it has been whispered—though who am I to say that the whisper is true?—that the steamboats got a rake-off in the way of commissions from the merchants of New Orleans with whom they placed the orders they brought down from Brown and the other planters.

In those red-tapeless days there were known to be such things as secret rebates to favored shippers. And when a big shipper was to take a trip on the boat, he was nearly always the guest of the captain, and so was his family.

With all that and taking into consideration the steamboat's vast expenditure for food, ice (they had ice and refrigerators in the 'Eighties), clean linen, fuel by the hundreds of tons each month, the innumerable other items under the general head of cost

of operation—the captain of a first class steamboat on the Lower River made money.

Take the *White's* mighty carrying capacities as an illustration. She could bring down, at once, 7,500 bales of cotton from Vicksburg and the Bends at an average, say, of $1.00 a bale. Frequently the price for carrying was $1.50 a bale. She could bring 4,000 sacks of cotton seed at 50 cents a sack. She could bring a mighty array of miscellaneous freight which, for the sake of argument, would amount to $1,500 at the very least. Add to this an average quota of cabin passengers, 200, at $10.00 each, and a thousand deck passengers (the cheapest freight in the world since it loads and unloads itself) at $2.00 a head.

Right there would be a $15,000 revenue for a single trip. The big cotton boats made two trips a week. Thirty thousand dollars a week for the busy season of twenty weeks would mount up to the staggering revenue of $600,000 gross earnings for one steamboat. Is it any wonder that the big packets made money or that their owners became wealthy? The *White* paid for herself over and over again during the first three or four years of her existence. And in the same way all the other boats in those mad and merry cotton carrying days made money.

Charley Smith's prediction had proved true: the New Orleans people and the planters and farmers up

the river had taken to the *White* like ducks to water. She became a general favorite.

Once a year she became a "royal barge." That was when Mardi Gras held the old city in its sway and Rex, king of Carnival, came majestically into the town from the mystic valleys of the moon. This monarch-for-a-day having selected the *White* as his royal barge, superseding the second *Robert E. Lee* who for all her beauty could not equal this larger boat, would go down the river to a secluded spot on shore. And there in the still dark hours of that "Fat Tuesday" which rings down the curtain on New Orleans' final fling before Lent, would board the deck of the great steamboat reserved especially for him that day. Then, with banners flying, whistles booming from every one of the scores of other boats which had brought Mardi Gras visitors to the town, with bands playing and negroes singing, the *White* would sweep grandly back into town and sidle up to the levee where an immense throng waited to greet Rex and partake of this one day of delicious and licensed foolery!

. . . Yes, it was the golden age of steamboating.

It was the custom of the times (of the *Times-Democrat* at least) to speak of the lady passengers (and there were always numbers of them) as though they were a bulk commodity: "A cargo of fair freight" or possibly as a "galaxy of beauty crowding the decks." Such statements caused Mark Twain to froth at the mouth. And however much we may

renounce so thoroughly trite a Victorianism in our own times, there remains the fact the freight *was* fair, that the girls were beautiful. All those lovely little Creoles traveling between the city and the plantations—dark-eyed, luminous, soft-voiced and supple!

And there was no lack of young men! On the steamboats, the orchestras played and the passengers danced—the young ones and maybe a few of the old ones too. And the scent of jasmine and lemon flower and magnolia breathed from either shore, along the decks. And the dim world went drifting by to the tune of laughter and music on board. The older women inside the "ladies' saloon" sat and sewed and talked and manipulated fans and played havoc with reputations, as women will. The gentlemen sat forward on deck and smoked and talked politics or gathered in the fragrant barroom and sampled the merits of the famed Sazerac and Ramos or honest-to-God Bourbon and swapped talk of the "late war." Or again, up in the private rooms in the Texas they played cards for high stakes, frequently winning or losing large sums in a much pleasanter way than their northern brothers in Wall Street were winning and losing every day.

Towards the stern of the boiler deck, where from the railing one could look back over the foamy wake left by the great wheels, Romance flourished. For here foregathered the paired-off young folks to talk and look at the moon. Probably there was not as much blatant and open petting as there is to-day, yet

there must have been plenty of hand-holding. For the negro deckhands, walking about to sweep up the decks and seeing couples seated there with locked hands, would sing:

"Comin' down de river
Settin' in de stern;
She had her hand on his'n
And he had his'n on her'n."



CHAPTER VI

HOW THEY BUILT THE STEAMBOATS

STEAMBOATS as beautiful as those which plied the rivers in the Second-Wind period could have been built in no other part of the world and by no other builders than the skilled workers at the river shipyards. For, save in the making of the machinery (which was sent to the yards by Frisbie or Rohan or Charles Barnes or some other of the famous steamboat engine builders, to be installed) the building of a steamboat was, from first to last, the work of individual craftsmen.

Generations of the same family worked at one yards, year after year, building steamboats . . . building steamboats; father and son: artisans every one. Skilled workmen fashioned the gracefully curving model-bow timbers. Skilled workmen in metal cut the ornate chimney-tops which looked down from enormous heights. Skilled workmen at the lathe and jig saw cut the delicate woodwork for railings, pilot house and cabin exteriors. Skilled workmen, hand carvers in wood, laboriously day after day turned out the carved stanchions and pillars and inlay panels for the cabin interiors.

The machine age, supposed to be well under way in

the 'Eighties, had in reality little to do with the building of boats for our Western Rivers. The steamboat builder and his employees knew their craft in the same way that the members of the guilds in medieval Germany knew theirs: from actual experience over long periods.

And here is an astounding fact I uncovered when I went to the Howards' plant to dig into the records, plans and specifications of old steamboats.

There weren't any!

Until comparatively recent times—that is, until the late 'Eighties—the river shipyards workers built steamboats in exactly the same manner that the makers of that lovely early American furniture created their wares. The furniture makers turned out chairs and tables and highboys and bureaus that were things of strength and beauty and admirably suited to the needs of their times. They had no drawings, no specifications to go by. Neither had the steamboat builders. They simply knew their stuff. By long apprenticeship they perfected their artisanry.

When an order for a steamboat came into a shipyards, the big boss gathered his men around him and described what he wanted done, assigning to each foreman the particular work to be accomplished by his force of men. If there were any drawings at all, the veriest rough pencil sketch sufficed, and that was thumbed to shreds in a few days.

There was no scientific figuring of stresses and strains. Few, if any of the shipyards men had any

technical schooling: they wouldn't have known how to follow a blue-print if they had had one! The wonder, it seems to me, is that they were able to turn out such marvelous boats with such an astounding lack of the scientific knowledge that is supposed to be necessary to the correct building of such things as big boats.

The *J. M. White* had no plans or specifications. Neither had the *Robert E. Lee*, the *Natchez*, the *Baltic*, the *Eclipse*, the *Shotwell*, the *Diana*, or any other of a thousand immortal steamboats. Probably the first steamboat of all to have a complete set of drawings was the *John W. Cannon*, built by the Howards for Captain Cannon himself, after that forthright old boatman's second *Robert E. Lee* had gone by the board. You may see these drawings of the *Cannon* at the Howards plant to-day: a beautifully-colored, detailed set in which the draughtsman (in the side elevation, at least) has endeavored to make the drawing look as much like a photograph as possible. The *Cannon* was not a large boat—as large boats go. She was two hundred and fifty-two feet long; but she had a piquancy of beauty all her own. She did an enormous passenger business on the Lower River out of New Orleans. Her boiler deck was extended out over her forecastle to a point flush with the main deck. And in another way she was unique: she had Pullman berths that folded away in the daytime! I have never heard that George Pullman entered suit against the owner of the *Cannon* for encroachment upon his

sleeping-car berth idea; but the old *Cannon* surely had that equipment. Her cabin was done in a soothing and quiet tone of green, enlivened by plenty of wood carvings and gold leaf.

Later, drawings for steamboats became the rule. The famous *Kate Adams*, the *City of Louisville*, the *City of Cincinnati*, *Indiana*, Captain Cooley's *America*, and the present *Cincinnati* were all built from architects' drawings. And, to-day, of course, it is all done by drawings.

Placing an order for a boat was a matter of halcyon simplicity. Such business terms as contracts, plans and specifications, directors' meetings, and long "conferences" were unknown in the Second-Wind period of American steamboating: they had not yet entered the vocabulary of Midwest business men. When a steamboat was to be built, its prospective owner—Captain Tobin; Captain Cannon; the Memphis Lee Line's president; Commodore Laidley; Captain Mason of the Anchor Line—would drop around to the Howards' plant (or to the Cincinnati Marine Ways, or some other old-time shipyards) and would be a guest at the builder's home for a week or ten days. The two would get together about the second or third day and discuss what the new boat was to be like. The owner wanted this or that added convenience. . . . Certainly, sir. You shall have it. And may I suggest that you do thus and so. . . . And so on.

She was to be so many feet long, to have certain

added advantages over other boats, to have a new arrangement of staterooms, possibly. . . . The two finally came to an agreement right then and there, except possibly as to price, and that really was a secondary consideration. The owner wanted a steamboat and wanted it built by this yards. That was all there was to it.

"And many a time," Mr. James Howard told me, "I have seen letters to my father reading this way:

"DEAR ED—Go ahead with that boat which we talked about last week. Add one more stateroom on each side, and one more steam capstan. Be sure to let me know in time so that we can have a crew ready to take her out.

"Yours, MASON."

And that was all, a gentlemen's agreement; but sufficient authority to add a fine new steamboat to the Anchor Line's fleet. For the Anchor Line alone the Howards built twenty boats.

Alas, the easy-going times passed with the old-time steamboating. Modern steamboatmen are just as careful in these times to have everything down in black and white; to work by specifications, plans and contract, as the most scientific of engineers could wish. Competitive bidding to get the contract for a steamboat replaces the easy-going "gentlemen's agreement." And the boat-builders work in steel today. The rattle of steam drill and riveter is heard in the land, replacing the recurring blows of heavy striking hammers in the hands of skilled workmen

driving home long spikes through heavy curved timbers.

Go to any shipyards to-day and you will find scientifically trained men poring over blue-prints, and figuring out matters as carefully as any deepwater engineers.

Western River practice in steamboat building has ever been a thorn in the flesh of deep-water marine engineers. These deep-water boys claim that the steamboat is neither flesh, fowl nor good red herring. It cannot be classified, they claim, in the Bureau of American Shipping classification. Particularly was this true prior to 1885; of later years they have come to pay a little more respectful attention to Western River methods.

Well, it is very true that the old-time steamboats could not be classified. If there is one fact I have been trying, all through this volume, to impress upon my readers it is that the steamboat was and is different from any other craft the world has ever seen. And one other fact: That no craft save the American steamboat—product of the genius of Henry Shreve—could have served the Midwest and South as well.

It used to be said on the rivers that, with proper care, a high-pressure steamboat engine would last forever. An exaggeration undoubtedly, but in the right direction. Steamboat machinery in old times was handed down from generation to generation, from steamboat to steamboat, over periods as long

as three-quarters of a century. I have before me a clipping from a recent issue of the *Waterways Journal:*

"The towboat *New Orleans,* which was destroyed by fire on the night of Friday, July 21, 1928, at Slidell, Louisiana, was one of the last of the old-time high-pressure towboats which operated on the Ohio and Mississippi thirty or forty years ago. She was built at Madison, Indiana, in 1889 and was originally named the *Louis Houck.* Her machinery was originally on the big side-wheel passenger packet, *Thompson Dean* (first) when that boat was built in Cincinnati in 1868. The second *Thompson Dean,* also a 300-foot passenger packet, used the machinery until 1882, when it was put into the big *Will S. Hays.* The *Hays* yielded the machinery, when she sank, to the *Louis Houck,* later the *New Orleans.*"

From 1868 to 1928, having been used on three separate passenger packets, and then put into a towboat! And any day I am expecting to hear that the machinery of that towboat has been raised and is to be put into another boat!

This is no unusual case in point. The present excursion boat, *America,* running out of Louisville, has the machinery of the old *Indiana,* of the White Collar Line. She in turn had inherited it from the old White Collar Liner, *Bostona III.* Commodore Laidley said:

"That machinery is now nearly seventy years old. The reason it has lasted is that it is high-pressure, not high speed, machinery and has been well taken care of, well oiled. Also, the Frisbie people, who built it

and built most of the machinery for my boats, knew their business."

Fourteen or fifteen revolutions a minute, for steamboats with wheels forty-five feet in diameter, was fast enough to send the boat forward at a lively pace. But it was also slow enough to reduce the wear and tear on the machinery to a negligible point.

It is generally admitted that while propeller boats may succeed sternwheel and sidewheel boats on the Mississippi proper in the steamboating revival, the sternwheeler will still prevail on the Ohio and other tributaries. While the Charles Ward Engineering Works has been designing Western River boats with "tunnel propellers" to accommodate themselves to Mississippi River work, other shipyards are turning out sternwheelers for work on the tributaries. Both prove serviceable. Oil is used predominantly for fuel. Compound and triple expansion engines are replacing gradually the old high-pressure engines; the resulting saving of fuel more than counter-balancing the use of high-speed machinery.

Henry Shreve's flat-bottom wooden steamboat has become a flat-bottom steel steamboat.

CHAPTER VII

THE COMMODORE AND THE OLD WHITE COLLAR LINE

MR. LYLE SAXON, in his valuable river book "Father Mississippi," speaks of the pleasure with which he looked forward to occasional visits of that uncle of his who was captain of a steamboat. Since Mr. Saxon cannot, surely, be on the far side of his early thirties, I imagine he conceived his first liking for steamboats about in the same way and at the same time I did. For the whole background of my boyish experiences, it seems to me, was an interwoven fabric of tales of the steamboats and stories told me of my Uncle Fred who was a mighty river man and steamboat owner "down at Cincinnati," and with looking forward to, and remembering afterwards, the visits he made to our home.

Nearly two score years before I made my triumphal entry into the world, he had ceased personally to command a single boat and had become president and general manager of the most far reaching of the later Ohio River steamboat companies with additional lines running up the Kanawha and to the far South. His full name is Frederick A. Laidley, but to the men on the river between Pittsburgh and Memphis he is

spoken of as "The Commodore." For it was he, who in the 'Eighties gathered together a number of smaller steamboat lines which were sinking into uselessness, and combining them with the old United States Mail Line which still ran its boats between Louisville and Cincinnati, organized the White Collar Line. And for a time, Ohio River steamboating, like steamboating on the lower river, got its second wind.

I have never been able to understand why the name was White Collar Line; whether simply because the insignia of the boats of that line was a double white band around each smokestack or whether it meant to convey the idea that only the white collared gentry traveled aboard them. Anyhow, the line did an extensive business among the better class of travelers as late as 1890—those (according to Mark Twain) post-mortem days of steamboating.

Commodore Laidley's career has been a long and picturesque one. He wrote me the other day from Florida—where, treading close upon his ninetieth year, he spends his days recalling old times and writing letters to old friends in a clear, unshaking, forceful hand—that the proudest day of his life was that day in 1860 when he came down from Charleston, Virginia, on the Kanawha to Louisville as supercargo of a flatboat load of salt from his own furnaces.

In his early twenties, while his father was "over in Dixie" (that is, over on the eastern side of the Alleghanies) in the Confederate service, he had taken over the running of the old Lorena Salt furnace near

the town of Malden, West Virginia. Because there was a mighty demand for salt in Cincinnati in those days where packing houses were shipping great cargoes of salt meat by steamboats every day. The presence of salt brine in the Kanawha Valley was discovered early in the 1800s about six miles above Charleston. The shy mountain deer would come down and lick the rocks along the river bank; this indicated to some watchers the fact that the flow of brine might be put to use commercially. The salt industry of the Kanawha Valley ended with the discovery of more modern methods of obtaining commercial salt and with the passing of the meat packing industry's supremacy at Cincinnati, which had depended upon the steamboats for transportation.

"There were forty furnaces in the Kanawha Valley making salt in 1850," said Commodore Laidley, and the meat packers and merchants would use every barrel we could supply."

"Do you know what a salt furnace is?" he asked me once. "It's nothing but a series of big iron pans nine feet long, cemented together, the whole business measuring about a hundred feet. Each of these pans was covered by a wooden steam-tight vat. The salt brine, after being boiled, was conveyed by pipes into long settling vats through which ran six-inch copper pipes. The steam caused by the boiling water passed through these pipes and kept the salt brine at the boiling point. After a certain period of boiling the brine was drawn into grainers; here the salt formed

and settled on the bottom. The water was drawn off. Every morning shovellers with great wood scoops would place the salt—each grain pure white and the exact shape of a hopper used in a flour mill—on salt boards and when it was dry a force of negroes packed it into barrels. Fifteen hundred to eighteen hundred barrels made up a flatboat-load of salt.

"I made that trip with a flatboat nearly a hundred feet long and a crew of three men besides a steersman. My job was to superintend the boat and to sell the salt. Up there on the Kanawha we shipped most of our salt by steamboat. But in dry weather, and when a pretty good stock of salt had collected at the furnace, we piled the whole business on a flatboat and sent her down the river to Cincinnati.

"Dozens of packing houses were ready to buy the large barrels containing seven bushels. Besides, we always packed a smaller barrel of five bushels which sold at a dollar a barrel for the merchants along the river.

"On this trip it happened that I had a full cargo of the smaller size—the five-bushel barrels weighing two hundred and eighty pounds. We had heard of a big need for salt at Louisville and beyond, that year (1860), and so my first stop except for supplies was Louisville. We had a falls pilot named Pink Varble —though why *Pink* I never knew—and he took us over that rush of water at Louisville at what was supposed to be the easiest point.

"I came nearer passing out then than at any other

time in my life. Just as we started down that long hill of water (the river was pretty high but the falls were roaring!) the current swung that old flatboat clean around so we went over stern foremost—*wham!* At the foot of the falls there is always a big wave; and that wave hit us and passed over the boat. But it passed so quickly it didn't do much damage other than knock a hole in our bottom. We ran in to the bank near New Albany as fast as we could and plugged the seams by the use of sawdust from a little saw mill upon the bank. I worked all night with my men and the next morning we started on down the river and landed at every town on the way.

"We were traveling salesmen of the old school!

"At every town we 'made,' the merchants, hearing of our arrival, would come down to the landing and bargain with us for salt. At Shawneetown, Illinois, I recall I sold one man three hundred barrels, and he paid me in three hundred one-dollar bills. That was considered a pretty good order for one merchant. We went on down to Smithland at the mouth of the Cumberland. From that point a line of pretty good steamboats ran back to Nashville, Tennessee. And I had exactly one hundred barrels left. So I sold that with the flatboat for a lot more one-dollar bills. Then I went up to a little bank on the main street of the town and asked for a draft. A man would be taking his life in his hands to travel with that much money on his person in those days.

"Remember now, that was before the war and

every state and most banks issued their own currency. Every bank subscribed to *Paddicks' Bank Note Detector*—it was a publication issued monthly in New York, and all banks in the country were listed as they were banks of issue. Well, when I asked for a draft at the bank, the cashier looked in the *Detector* and then said:

"'Your Illinois and Tennessee money is now at a ten per cent discount. But if you want to save that amount, I'll give you a draft for your other money—that's at par now—and when you get on the steamboat tell the clerk you would like to exchange the Illinois and Tennessee currency. He'll take it all right and buy wood with it from the woodyards. (All boats burned wood in those days.) Those fellows at the woodyards live back in the woods and any currency is good at those country stores where they deal! They don't know what discount means!'

"So I followed his advice and everything was all right. I boarded the big steamer *Diana* there at Smithland and came on back to Louisville. The water was a little too low for her to get over falls and so she couldn't come in up to Cincinnati and I had to change there at Louisville.

"But I'll never forget her. She was the biggest boat I had ever seen and the fastest. Her Captain, E. T. Sturgeon, told me she had just beat the *Baltic* in a big race. Her flags and pennants were flying and bands playing and I had some of the best food I'd ever tasted, on her. I think maybe it was that ride

on the *Diana* that finally decided me to go into the steamboat business. More or less all my life I had been used to steamboats. My uncle, Monroe Quarrier, had been captain of the old *James Hewitt* in Mobile Bay in the 'Forties. The city of Mobile had presented him with a silver service for an act of heroism on the occasion of the burning of another boat. I have some of that service now. When I used to visit my grandfather's plantation where the center of the city of Huntington, West Virginia, now is (it was Virginia then) I used to see big Pittsburgh Packets going by from Cincinnati. And once when I was only a little tad my father took me on one of those boats to Pittsburgh and to hear Jenny Lind sing.

"But the *Diana* was the prettiest of all!"

A good passenger business was to be had by enterprising steamboatmen out of Charleston for Cincinnati and way points in the 'Sixties. Charleston, located on debatable ground in the Civil War, was part of the time in the hands of the Yankees; the rest of the time, the Rebels had it. But by 1864 the Yanks had gained the upper hand for "the duration," to all appearances. Laidley and some business associates built the steamboat *Annie Laurie* and placed her in the Kanawha and Cincinnati trade with Laidley as Captain, after a few months' service as clerk. She was a good-sized boat for those days and those rivers —two hundred feet long with a big stern wheel, drawing very little water and possessed of the most beautiful whistle on earth.

A word about steamboat whistles. They are far different things from the fog-horn, hoarse-croaking, blare-throated sirens on ocean ships. Ships' whistles —all that I have ever heard—have only one tone, a single deep note which could not by the stretching of one's imagination be called beautiful. Tradition says the steam whistle was the invention of the celebrated Watt of the firm of Watt and Bolton, English engine builders in 1820, with whom Robert Fulton had dealt.

Brought to the Western Rivers of the United States, the steam whistle underwent changes. Steamboat builders went the ship builders one better. They made a whistle of blended tones, a musical whistle.

The main purpose of a steamboat whistle is to announce to the residents of towns and landings the approach of the boat. Even large cities were comparatively quiet in the old days; no motor cars roared; few, if any, trolley cars clanged. It was said that residents of New Orleans could hear the deep tones of the approaching steamboats as they rounded Nine Mile Bend—half hour or more before docking; which provided ample time to get from one's home to the boat. But it was necessary—there being so many steamboats—to provide some manner of recognizing the different boats as they approached. It would never do to go down to the levee, on hearing a whistle, to board the *City of Baton Rouge*, for instance, and find that the boat whose call you heard was one of a hundred others! And so the steamboat builders found that by arranging several tones—three or four

or five—and grouping them into a single musical-chord whistle, to be placed like a pompon atop the pilot's house, the result would be a mellow and individual trumpeting to announce the coming of the boats.

It would be too much to say that no two steamboat whistles were the same, what with the vast number of steamboats afloat; but certainly the steamboat builders vied with one another in endeavoring to produce the most distinctive whistles. The particular shipyards' workman who was engaged in making whistles found that his ear for music was called into play as well as his mechanical ingenuity. The whistle tubes were first made of sheet iron with sliding bottoms which could be raised or lowered when the steam entered to obtain the desired tone. When all three or four or five tones were successfully pitched, the whistle was cast in brass or bronze or copper.

Commodore Laidley's *Annie Laurie* had a five-tone whistle which, when blown, would start off on the highest note; then the deep bass tones would immediately chime in, then the successively higher tones, one by one, until the whole blended, mellow chord was sent bounding back and forth between the hills that border the Kanawha and the Ohio. And all the dogs in all the towns where the *Annie Laurie* touched would come out on the bank and howl!

Like bagpipe music, steamboat whistle music must be heard at a distance to be fully appreciated!

The old *Annie Laurie* made money for her captain during the three years between 1864 and 1867 when she rarely left the Malden or Charleston wharf without a thousand barrels of salt for down river and a cabin full of passengers, and returned with packed meat and more passengers.

In the summer of 1866 cholera had come up the river from New Orleans on the steamboats and the infection was carried on board a number of steamboats at Cincinnati. Among these was the *Annie Laurie*.

"That was a terrible trip for me," explained Commodore Laidley. "It nearly finished me. My mate, one of my pilots, one engineer and two deckhands died on that three-day trip from Cincinnati to Charleston. We had to stop the boat and bury them on the bank. I had my sister on board and a large number of other women passengers and, of course, they were pretty nearly frantic. For nearly seventy-two hours I didn't close my eyes. And when we came up to Charleston they wouldn't let us land, for fear we would start the spread of cholera, and two days we had to lay anchored out in midstream."

At the end of the war there was an immediate call from the government for steamboats on all the rivers to transport troops back to their homes. And Captain Laidley's *Annie Laurie* carried many thousand homesick Yankees, now that the war was over, from the lower Tennessee regions back to the North—

which paid her owner about one hundred and fifty dollars a day.

Following that, the Kanawha salt manufacturers, needing an agent in Cincinnati, offered the job to Laidley who now did a double business as commission merchant and steamboatman. The demand for salt was so great that the orders poured in faster than they could be filled. In a short time Laidley, having sold the *Annie Laurie* (she went to the scrap heap years after; but I wish I knew where that whistle was!) went himself into the meat-packing business in Cincinnati and prospered, built a home in Covington overlooking the steamboat-infested Ohio and became wealthy. He pulled off a publicity stunt in those pre-advertising days—1880—that would do honor to any publicity agent that ever "put one over" on Broadway. It came about in this manner:

The steamboats up to the middle 'Seventies had been transporting all the meat products out of Cincinnati to supply the entire South and West and a goodly part of the "near east." It was Cincinnati's position as a steamboat centre, indeed, that made her the meat packing center of America; and with the passing of the steamboat vanished the prestige of the Queen City in that regard. But as late as 1881 a vast amount of meat was still moving out from Cincinnati and the new Cincinnati Southern Railway, running southward through Kentucky and Tennessee to the Gulf Cities was making a strong and increasingly suc-

cessful bid for a good part of the meat business—prophetic of the beginning of the end.

Laidley went to the officials of the Cincinnati Southern.

"I'll promise to load your entire first freight train out of Cincinnati, from tender to caboose, if you'll let me paste a few posters on the sides of the cars." There was no sinister Interstate Commerce Commission ruling as yet. Such a procedure was perfectly lawful. The railway people jumped at the chance. Laidley had a thousand big posters printed:

F. A. Laidley & Co.
Meat Packers
Cincinnati, Ohio

and loaded a big freight train of thirty cars from end to end. Then he plastered those posters over the entire train.

"For several years afterwards," the Commodore chuckled when he told this, "I would see, in various parts of the country, old freight cars with those tattered labels still sticking to them.

"It was the best advertising I ever did. The next year I did a three million dollar business."

But the call of the river is strong. From the cupola of his old gray brick home in Covington, Laidley watched, day after day, the comings in and goings out of the steamboats and longed once more to have a part in river activities. So, with the passing of Cincinnati's meat-packing supremacy, and along about

the time Mark Twain said steamboating was dead, Laidley succumbed again to the lure of the river, bought three or four steamboat lines and combined them into one.

The basis of the new organization was the United States Mail Line, the oldest steam navigation company in the world. Long after steamboats of this line had yielded with great reluctance the right of carrying mail to the railroads, the name remained painted on the sides of each—The United States Mail Line—the owners of the line not realizing that such a name was not lawful under the circumstances. A suit resulted in which for a time the officers of the Mail Line thought they must transfer a large amount of cash to the government; but sometime in the 'Nineties the case was settled by the Mail Line paying the government something like a hundred dollars for unlawful but unintentional use of the name. And thereafter the company became the Louisville and Cincinnati Packet Company.

But when Laidley became the largest stockholder and president, the company was still the Mail Line. For—and herein is voiced the opinion of many a river man to-day—had the steamboat operators of the Second Wind period of steamboating gone after the freight and passenger business with anything approaching the advantages offered to shippers by the railroads, the river trade might not have suffered so complete an eclipse. Not but what the railroads, with their tactics of illicit rate-slashings, would have

got the bulk of the business anyway; not but what the desire for speed would have, in itself, drawn from the steamboats a good part of the business they had enjoyed exclusively for more than half a century. These things undoubtedly would have happened in any event. But a sizeable and welcome slice of the business could have been retained had the steamboatmen adopted the modern methods of the railroads to get it. There is, and always has been, a vast amount of freight which is in no particular hurry and which can move on steamboats more cheaply than on the rails. There is, and always has been, a great number of people who like to travel by river and will choose a steamboat (provided it is comfortable and luxurious) rather than a railroad train.

For a while, through the dull days of the late 'Eighties, the 'Nineties and the early 1900's, steamboatmen did build some fine boats in an attempt to hold a part of the business. But something more than fine and luxurious cabins, something more even than swift packets, is necessary to keep the business permanently. The extra conveniences offered by the newcomers were so great in contrast with the almost archaic equipment of the steamboat companies that the passenger and freight business went over solidly to the railroads.

Now if, at this point, this most critical time in the history of the river trade, the steamboat operators had built adequate terminals (so that freight need no longer be unloaded at way landings and left un-

covered on the bank, with the freight bill on top held down by a clod of dirt!); if, on the lower river steamboats had not made it necessary for cotton shippers to haul their bales over the muddy levees in order to load on the decks; if, in short, the steamboats had put forth their utmost to retain the business they had, as late as 1895, the sad tale of the passing of the packets might not have had to be related. Certainly the decline would not have been so complete as it was. A portion of the way landing business would have remained to the boats some years longer—until possibly the coming of the motor trucks, at least.

But the new conditions were not met by the steamboatmen. And the reason to-day is obvious to us. They had not the capital with which to expand. The speed, the conveniences of the railroads had swept all before them; the people along the rivers—as a whole—were losing faith in the rivers as highways.

Yet for a while, after the effects of the Civil War had worn off, steamboating seemed to take a new hold on life on the Ohio, even as it had done on the lower river. That was before the actual decline had set in.

Most far-sighted business men fully realized that the railroads must eventually drive the boats from the river. But that was then still some years ahead. An association of Ohio steamboat owners, about 1870, pooled their interests into a sort of confederacy of boats and inaugurated a service known as the "O" Line, to the South. The "O" stood for Ohio

and was swung like a huge gold pendant between the stacks of each boat. For the most part the steamboats in the "O" Line were stern-wheelers, the longest that have ever run. The *Golden City*, for example, was three hundred and seven feet long, and her sisters running in the same line, the *Golden Rule*, *Golden Crown*, the *Paris C. Brown*, were nearly that long. Lacking the wide guards, which so distinguished the boats in the southern cotton trade, they seemed in their great slenderness to attain an even greater length, presenting to view a long, graceful sweep of unbroken deck well raised fore and aft.

Cincinnati, long the distributing point, the gateway of the South and West, was giving way before the virile energies of Chicago. A change in the mode of transportation can work havoc with existing conditions: geographic lines, centers of population, alter as the natural highways cease to carry on the commerce of the section and the artificial highways assume the burden. With the extension of railroads, Cincinnati ceased to be the logical gateway to the South and Southwest she once had been when from her wharves you boarded a steamboat to take you away anywhere!

In the same way the huge meat-packing industry that once centered in the Queen City took a leap westward some three hundred miles and settled definitely in Chicago—just rebuilding for permanence after the disastrous fire of something more than a decade before. The reason for the move was that Chicago was

nearer to the great plains and prairies from which the stock could be brought in for slaughter. And the center of the industry, being no longer dependent upon the natural highways, soon drew to itself innumerable networks of steel. Chicago became the railway center of the country, serving not only the West and South by rail, as Cincinnati had done by steamboat, but the entire world as well.

An incurable disease had struck steamboating. It was dying a slow death, even as it has been dying for the last twenty years, though few cared to acknowledge it. The disease might be summed up in some one word which could comprise the statement "failure to keep abreast of the times."

The negro sang songs about the "O" Line boats, one of which went:

> Oh, de *Golden Rule* and de *Golden Crown,*
> De *Golden City* and de *Paris C. Brown,*
> You takes de *Rule* and you meets de *Crown*
> And gits ter Memphis on de *Paris C. Brown.*

The *Reuben R. Springer,* an independent sidewheeler, was recognized everywhere as the fastest boat out of Cincinnati in the Mississippi trade. There is no record of her time that I have been able to locate, but once when her pilot on a dark, misty night ran her into a bank of willows at Baton Rouge—to which the railroad had recently been extended—and a locomotive whistle sounded on the shore, the rousters shouted to one another:

"Lawd Gawd, ole *Springer* done beat all de steamboats! Now we's gwine aft' de ra'road trains!"

By an agreement between the individual owners in that association known as the "O" Line, the owners maintained set dates for sailing and did not engage in any ruinous rate-cutting to get the business one from another. They did a great business, though later on rate-cutting played its part in strangling the river boats.

Commodore Laidley in 1884 bought stock in an up-river packet company, known as the Cincinnati, Portsmouth, Pomeroy and Big Sandy Packet Company, of which Captain John Kyle was president. It had been organized in 1873 and was running some big side-wheelers from Cincinnati up the river. The company was capitalized at $300,000. Within a few years this company drew together the down-river lines—the United States Mail Line to Louisville, and the Cincinnati, Memphis and New Orleans Line to the far South; the whole organization known as the White Collar Line, with F. A. Laidley as president.

A new order of things had begun, a reversal of the old order before the Civil War. Railroad lines had been built as feeders to the steamboats. Now the steamboats ran as feeders and auxiliaries to railroads. The Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad had been completed from the Atlantic seaboard at Newport News, Virginia, west as far as Huntington. Eastward the line and connections extended to Cincinnati. A space of one hundred and sixty-five miles along the Ohio

remained yet to be covered by rail. Here the railroads needed the steamboats. Passengers traveling either east or west on the Chesapeake & Ohio would cover that distance on the swift White Collar Line packets, *Fleetwood*, *Telegraph*, or *Chesapeake*. These boats had long been famous on the Upper River for their speed and equipment.

Running to New Orleans from Cincinnati—two boats a week—Laidley operated the *New South*, the new *Mary Houston*, the *Longfellow*, the *Buckeye State*, the *John K. Speed*, the *State of Kansas*, the *State of Missouri*.

In 1886 the *Fleetwood* and *Big Sandy* were put in the Louisville trade. The *Telegraph* and *Bostona* ran to Pomeroy, Ohio; the *Bonanza* to Portsmouth; the *General Pike* and *City of Vevay* to Madison.

But in 1894, at a time when the river trade was visibly declining, Laidley set to work to build and put into the Louisville trade three of the finest steamers built within the two previous decades on the Ohio. The three were completed by 1898—the *City of Louisville*, 307 feet long, the *City of Cincinnati*, 300 feet long, the *Indiana* (now the *America*), 285 feet long. All were equipped with a type of upholstery that bespoke a restraint over the luxuries of the older boats, but they had large and commodious staterooms; the cabins were spacious and airy. The gingerbread work was reduced to a minimum, and the *Louisville* had the most graceful dip in her cabin that ever was seen.

They were all remarkable for their speed—the *Louisville* especially. Over that one hundred and fifty-mile stretch of river between Louisville and Cincinnati (the course of the oldest steamboat company in existence) this last of the fast boats made better time than any of her predecessors. She still holds the record, although she and her sister boat, the *City of Cincinnati,* have gone to their doom—destroyed by the ice in the winter of 1918-19.

From the cupola of an old gray house on the Kentucky shore opposite, on that gray day in winter when the ice gorge wrecked the boats, the Commodore watched the destruction powerless to prevent it. For twenty years those boats in the Louisville trade had run and, though decreasingly, had made money. But this last tragedy—the ice completing the work of devastation which the railroads had begun—closed the steamboat career of Frederick A. Laidley. High insurance rates, railroad competition, changing times, had done their work.

The Commodore retired to Florida to spend his days reading, fishing, and writing letters about old times.

CHAPTER VIII

ROUSTABOUT, COONJINE AND DE STEAMBOATS

IN a pleasant song book compiled not long ago by Carl Sandburg entitled "The American Song Bag," the steamboat song is conspicuous by its absence. This puzzled me for a time. How Carl Sandburg, searching for songs which most typify the American spirit of the West and Middle West in the early years of the last century, could have overlooked the songs clustering about so profoundly an American institution as the steamboat! I knew that there were songs peculiar to steamboat life and to nothing else—to the negro roustabouts who added by their very presence so much to the colorful steamboating days on the Western Waters. All my life I had heard rousters singing as they loaded and unloaded the steamboats. Why, I asked myself, should Carl Sandburg, who is known to have a most commendable fondness for negro folksongs, have overlooked the roustabout river songs?

But when I sailed in to make a collection of those same steamboat songs myself, I understood. It is practically impossible to transmit most of them to print. By that I don't mean to say all rouster songs are unfit to be sung in mixed company. Far from it,

I believe that a very few unprintable songs ever lightened the labor of any boatload of rousters. But I do know it is difficult as pulling eyeteeth to find an old river rouster who will sing those songs in this day and time, in such a clear and pronounceable manner as to enable you to transfer the words to paper and make sense out of them. Nearly all the old roustabouts are dead, for one thing.

You may have heard these quaint, semi-barbaric melodies floating up to you on the upper steamboat deck as you have watched a crowd of rousters below loading the boat under the energetic urgings of a mate; swinging in an unending stream up and down the stageplank; transferring a mountain of miscellaneous freight from the bank to the forecastle, from the forecastle to the bank. You may have caught the perfectly balanced rhythms, the recurring, modulated minors, the same comically wailing refrain, the identical names running through the songs again and again. But when you endeavored to capture a stanza, even a line, in words that can be put down in black and white, the vast chances are that you gave up in despair.

Some time, however, you may be fortunate enough to discover—in some old river city, along a water front where dingy rheumatic streets, once fine, parallel the channel; where empty brick buildings stare with vacuous eyes over the now almost deserted waterway, wistful for the return of the palmy steam-

boat days,—you may discover a few old-time roustabouts who still retain unclouded memories of the Coonjine songs. For a slight consideration they will sing for you.

("Coonjine" was the official, technical and recognized name of the rousters' songs. Why? Heaven only knows. Even Mr. Harris Dickson of Vicksburg, who knows about all there is to know about the river steamboats and roustabouts, does not seem to recall the origin of the word. It is just one of those words, which, way back there in some forgotten year, attached itself to that swinging slouch and shuffle of rhythmic feet up the stageplank. Later, the music which beat out the time to those shuffling feet—the swaying measures, timed to the "give" and rebound of the stageplank—came to justify the name also.)

Or, better still, you may chance to be at the Bienville Street wharf in New Orleans on some lazy, somnolent spring day which hangs pleasantly over the city and puts everybody, especially the negroes, in a good humor. A visit to this wharf should be made about three o'clock of a Saturday afternoon. The sturdy little sternwheel packet *Ouachita* is just then preparing to leave for her five-hundred-mile trip northward. And in this scene you will find the sole remaining touch of the old-time steamboating. Captain Cooley, dignified master of the boat, is looking down austerely from the upper deck. A few passengers—possibly a dozen or even a score—are either

coming aboard or are seated in the deck chairs just behind him. The mate, two hundred and twenty-five-pound "Cap'n Sam," stands on the shore just at the land end of the stage. Possibly he is armed with a hoe handle or the shank end of a broomstick for the wholesome admonishment of any lagger behind among the roustabouts.

And the rousters themselves! A long black line of them—ragged, picturesque, happy-go-lucky fellows—exact prototypes of the roustabouts of a departed era! They are loading the last remaining piles of freight. Sacks of flour, sugar, meal; or maybe a strange assortment of farm implements; a hundred pails of candy for country stores far up in Arkansas; clothes baskets, tin washtubs, bunches of bananas, numerous articles of household furniture; all bound for isolated sections which even in this day and time the railroad has not reached.

Two rousters stand at the pile of freight ashore. Their job is to lift each sack and place it on a rouster's shoulder as he swings into place. They sing:

> Up sack! You gone!
> Up sack! You gone!
> N' Yawlins niggers ain' got no sense,
> Up sack, you gone!

Or maybe it is—

> Come hyuh, you ole rouster!
> Poke out yo' neck ve'y long!
> Tell me which shoulder you wants it on!

And the rousters who are doing the actual carrying chime in with a rhythmical and good-natured refrain:

Ole roustabout ain' got no home,
Makes his livin' by his shoulder bone!

And you will be ready to agree that that is really the way he makes his living, for each sack finds its lodgment in the crevice between a black head and shoulder—on the shoulder bone literally. The carrier humps over to one side until the sack is thus perfectly poised between his head and "scrouged up" shoulder. He places his hand upon his hip as a brace and then Coonjines up the stageplank. He does not walk up. Nor can it be rightly said that he runs up the plank, or slouches up or paces up. The Coonjine is a combination of all four.

As the stage swings and gives under the rousters' tread, Cap'n Sam's hack-saw voice urges the men to greater effort:

"Snatch them things up, Mose! Get a wiggle on you. You ain't lame, are you, Ike, shake yore leg! Good God, I ain' never seen such a bunch of low-down lazy niggers in all my days." All of which does not greatly terrify the rousters.

If the pace of the men quickens, the beat of the song quickens also for the two must be in perfect harmony. It is as impossible for a negro under these conditions to move or to sing unrhythmically as it would be for him to be unready when the dinner bell rings.

And it is an astonishing thing—the way the piles of freight disappear under the urgings of the mate and the beauty of the song:

De Coonjine, jine de Coonjine,
De Coonjine, jine de Coonjine,
Roll dat cotton bale down de hill
De Coonjine, jine de Coonjine.

Beauty, did I say? And with reason! There is a haunting, if barbaric quality to all the Coonjine songs which it is impossible to convey through the medium of cold print. You cannot understand it until you have heard it.

When the freight is all loaded, the final rouster shouting as he goes up the plank, "De las' sack!" the rousters all take their places on shore in a close group around the end of the stage. The mate lumbers landward to make his selection of the men to go on the trip.

The rousters greet him with cries:

"Lemme go 'long wid you, boss man!"

"You knows me, Cap'n Sam! I wants to go!"

"You ain' gwine lef' Mose, is you, boss?"

Connecting black names with black faces is one of the mate's principal jobs. He makes his selection deliberately:

Tobe, and Slim, and Big Jawn, and Yaller Ned and Vicksburg Red. About a dozen in all. Each of the rousters chosen hurries back on deck and disappears in the neighborhood of the boilers, each dodging

agilely a half-good-natured "lick" from the mate's hoe handle. Their work is over until the next landing, Baton Rouge, early to-morrow morning. Crap games and seven-up are soon under way. The *Ouachita* backs out from shore and stands away upstream to the quiet rivers of Louisiana and Arkansas.

Since steamboating began on the river in 1817 the roustabout has been a necessary part and parcel of that colorful and active life. In slavery times, a steamboat owner worked his own negroes as rousters. Later when the long arm of constitutional amendment had turned loose upon the South a horde of negroes with nothing to do, Sam and Mose and Jawn and all the heretofore farm hands felt an irresistible drawing toward the rivers. Steamboating was then entering the period of its second wind, so to speak; the big packets were being built. Captains John Tobin and Tom Leathers and John Cannon set the pace with such mighty packets as the world had never seen—the *Natchez* series, the *Robert E. Lee* series; later on the monster *J. M. White*, the *Ed Richardson* and a dozen others. And the great boats from the Ohio too. The work of the rouster particularly suits a negro. On a steamboat there is a chance to move from place to place, to see the country, which to him is the world—the world of N'yawlins and Memphis and Looeyville and Sain' Looey and Cincinnati. You might search the world over and never find a job

which entailed less responsibility than that of the roustabout. A boy workin' on de steamboat was assured of always plenty to eat. That was a matter of prime importance—three good meals a day. There was always a place to sleep. Although the work, while it lasted, was hard and wearing upon even the toughest muscles, there were always long periods of inactivity—hours of sleeping contentedly in the sunlight on the deck, roosting quietly on the guards with your feet dangling pleasantly in the water, or rolling the white-spotted ivories with one's cronies, and of swaggering ashore at the end of the run to cut a swath among one's less fortunate neighbors who had not the broadening advantages of travel.

As for clothing—well, the costume of the average roustabout was not an extensive thing. A respect for the conventions compelled the rouster to wear more than the "twisted piece of rag and the goatskin waterbag" of the Kipling poem, but his costume was not much more than that—at least not while he was on the boat and that was most of the time. His pay money—that which did not go to some fellow-rouster who was luckier at cards or dice, or was not sent to some woman, his wife or otherwise—went to purchase flashy clothes for use when in town 'tween trips. Like sailors on deep waters the rousters were known to have women in every river town.

Oh, I whoop my woman and I black her eye,
But I won't cut her th'oat kaze I skeered she might die—

was the refrain of a famous rouster song. A simple domestic embroglio likely to come to pass, thus, was embodied by the roustabout in a Coonjine song. And in like manner be put into words, however unrhetorical, the happenings, the personages, the circumstances of his daily toil and environment.

When they were especially "skittish" about a mate who was known to be too all-fired handy with a stick, the song ran like this—

'Tain't no use fer dodgin' roun'!
Dat ole mate jes' behine you!
Better cut dat step and coonjine out,
De ole mate jes' behine you!

For loading cotton on the levee: Rouster Sam with his cotton hook prances up alongside a tier of cotton bales, and sings:

Catfish swimmin' in de water,
Nigger wid a hook an' line,
Says he catfish, "Look here, nigger man,
You ain' got me dis time!"
(*spoken*) C'mon, bale. Got you!

I know of many sorts of labor in which the laborers are forbidden to sing while working. But it was different on the steamboats. Far from objecting to the rousters' singing, both captains and mates liked it. Mark Twain tells of the departing song sung by the negroes as each boat pulled from its berth at New Orleans and stood away for the North. But those songs were not especially steamboat songs; they were

merely the songs current in that day and time, learned by the negroes and sung to please the passengers and the public on shore as the boats departed.

But Coonjine was something else altogether. Coonjine songs belonged peculiarly to the river—to the rouster. He composed the words—many times the music too—words and music known up and down the rivers for thousands of miles. And it was not alone for the pleasure of hearing his workers' song that the mate encouraged the singing of the Coonjine. Coonjine had a decidedly utilitarian advantage.

Every Southerner knows that negroes will work better if they move in unison. A deep-rooted love for rhythm—running back to African days—is imbedded in their nature ineradicably. Let a brass band play in the offing, let a boy with a "juice" harp and "banjer" set the pace, and the negroes will follow so intent upon the music that they forget how hard they are working. The harder they work, the more they sing. The same applies to Coonjine songs. Freight could be loaded and unloaded in record time if the roustabouts sang at it.

And another reason. Moving in perfect time meant that the rousters' feet hit the stageplank with uniform precision. A wise thing too! For if a rouster should step upon the vibrating boards, *out of time* and thus catch the rebound of the stageplank, he was very likely to be catapulted with his load over into that muddy bourne from which no rouster returns—or rarely so.

Improvisation is the keynote of Coonjine. Sameness in wording is the death of the roustabout song. Your roustabout felt at perfect liberty to change the wording of these river songs somewhat, just so long as he kept the main idea intact. Hence you will find countless versions of songs. A swarthy gentleman—a French negro from below Canal Street in New Orleans—by the name of Clearfield Prethenier, who had worked the *Jessie K. Bell,* gave me this version of a song:

Hop, ole rouster, hop!
Cargo drunk. Got ter go ter town!
Move, ole man! I know yer gwine!
Momma done hired ole poppa out.

Only a few months ago, coming up from Louisville on the new sidewheeler, *Cincinnati,* I ran across a roustabout whom I had seen frequently as a boy on Kanawha River boats. He was still nicknamed Ankline Bob—probably because he once worked on the famous Anchor Line boats between St. Louis and New Orleans. And although his hair is rapidly graying, his youthful slouch up and down the stageplank has lost apparently none of its vigor. Now Ankline Bob's versions of the foregoing four-line song was rather different—decidedly more colorful and not to be put into print. But it was instantly recognizable. I asked him what boats he had worked on as a boy.

"Lawd Gawd, boss, dey's so many un 'em dat I most fergit. Down in N'yawlins, I work' on de *Par-*

gaud dat belong to Cap'n Tobin. Den I work on de big ole *R. R. Springer* whut run up here to Cincy. Work on de *Jawn K. Speed*, too, and fer a short time on de 'O' line boats. 'Member dat ole song, boss man, 'bout dem 'O' line boats?

"De *Golden Rule* and de *Golden Crown.*
De *Golden City* an' de *Paris C. Brown.*
You takes de *Rule* and you meets de *Crown.*
And you sees de *City* on de *Paris C. Brown.*"

The *Cincinnati* just then was drawn up at her home city, panting easily after her one-hundred-and-fifty-mile run from Louisville. A group of a dozen negroes, Bob among them, were unloading a fairly good-sized (for these degenerate times) load of freight. All the roustabouts were young, save Bob, but none of them worked with the vim and rhythm of the old rouster. These up-river niggers consider it, these days, a mark of unsophistication to chant the old rouster songs. So they work without music. Bob's voice, as he sang this four-line epic eulogizing a once famous line of boats operating between Cincinnati and New Orleans, rose youthful and melodious. A few of the younger rousters, their work over, gathered around with grins of delight and chuckles.

"Dat's it, Bob!"

"You young boys doan know nuthin' 'bout Coon-jine," old Bob retorted. He turned suddenly toward me: "Boss, you done axed me 'bout de diffunt boats I work on. I liked de Lee Line boats outer Memphis

bettern enny uv 'em. Kaze dey had de bes' lookin' chambermaids! Now watch me, you young niggers, and I'll show you de Coonjine as she oughter be did!"

Bob snatched up a keg of nails from the wharfboat floor, swung it lightly to his shoulder, braced himself properly; and then amid the guffaws of the young rousters slouched and shuffled off the stage, singing:

"De reason I likes de Lee Line trade
Walk an' talk wid de chambermaid
She gimme some pie and she gimme some cake,
An' I give her all de money dat I ever make!"

Bob went on, putting down the keg of nails, "Yas-sir! Ole Lee Line sho' had some good boats, Boss. Dar wuz de *Peters Lee* an' de *Rees Lee* an' *Georgy Lee* and *Stacker Lee*. I work on all dem boats. But dey didn' pay no money like de big boats did! 'Nother ole song went like dis:

"Who been here sints I been gone.
Big Black nigger wid a derby on,
Layin' right dar in my bed
Wid heels crack' open like cracklin' bread."

A first class mate on one of the big Mississippi and Ohio River packets had to be an accomplished man. Besides being expert in loading a cargo of freight—placing it systematically and in the correct sections of the deck to insure the right balance and draft of the boat—he had to be past master in the art of handling men of color. He had to be strong-armed, a despot in his little realm, possessed of a sense of

humor (though of a dignified sort) to match that peculiar to the negro character. More, too, he must possess that indescribable trait which may be summed up in the descriptive clause: "He just simply knows how to get along with niggers!"

For without that diplomacy—that nice blending of stern authority and easygoingness—the mate could not get the best efforts from the rousters. And best efforts were absolutely necessary if the boat was to be got up the river and back on time. Rousters were known to be willing and eager to work under a certain mate who had a reputation for being heavy-handed and quick on the trigger, simply because he possessed that peculiar understanding of their character, appreciated their weaknesses and strong points. On the other hand, it is said by old-timers that there were some mates noted for their leniency who would experience great difficulty in getting a full quota of the best rousters for each trip. Because they simply could not handle them.

Probably one of the most famous mates of the river was the redoubtable Tom Hastings on Captain John W. Cannon's historic *Robert E. Lee*, of racing fame. The *Lee* was a mighty cotton carrier. In the days before every planter ceased to send his weekly quota of cotton bales to the levee for loading on the boats for shipment to market at New Orleans, a veritable army of roustabouts was needed to supply the hundreds of cotton boats on the river. Tom Hastings was said to know by name every rouster between

Cairo and the foot of Canal Street! And in that thousand miles there must have been several thousands of them.

Tom Hastings' daughter married another famous mate who now is serving his district in the Louisiana state legislature—Captain Billy Duke of New Orleans. He was for years mate on the racer *Natchez*, and, later, on the huge *J. M. White*. There was never a sterner mate nor a better liked one in "the Bends" trade.

"They used to accuse us mates of being hard on the negroes," Captain Duke told me not long ago. "Why, hang it all, we had to be hard on them! You get a crowd of rousters on a boat, with hours of doing nothing between landings and it's not long before they think up some devilment. So we had to use a pretty heavy hand. All rousters were born thieves; they'd steal from the passengers or the crew and from each other.

"It was really dangerous for people with money in their pockets to travel 'deck passage' on this account. I remember a young farmer got on the *White* somewhere near Helena, and wanted deck passage to New Orleans. Deck passage, you understand, did not include meals and berth; only passage. The deck passengers had to ride on the lower deck among the piles of freight. It cost about one-fifth of the cabin passage price. Sometimes the *White* carried five hundred deck passengers. This time there were only a few. Our chief engineer, Charley Smith, asked this

young farmer if he had any money on him. Yes, he had three hundred dollars in his inside pocket.

"'Why, boy!' says Smith, 'you ought to be traveling in the cabin. It's dangerous down here among the niggers. Did you see any of these rousters looking at you?'"

Yes, it seemed there had been a rouster watching him as he came on board.

"'Well,' Smith said to this young chap, 'you lie right down here beside those cotton bales and pretend you're asleep. We'll catch that black scoundrel.'

"Sure enough, it wasn't ten minutes after that boy had lain down like he was asleep before Smith—he could look down the aisles of cotton bales unobserved—saw a nigger crawling along on top of the piles about twelve feet up. This black son-of-a-biscuit-eater pulled a little piece of cotton out of a bale, and emptied some chloroform on it and put it between his toes. (Lord knows where he got the dope, but that's what it was.) Then if he didn't lower himself down over the edge of the bales and press that cotton against the boy's nose!

"But just then Charley Smith made a dive for him and broke an axe handle over his head. That nigger rolled over like a log. He never made a sound. We put him ashore at the next landing, and from that time he never set foot on the *White* again.

"The *White* carried ninety rousters besides her regular crew. She was the finest packet on the rivers. She could come bulging down the sugar coast (that's

what we river men call the Mississippi shore between New Orleans and Vicksburg) with 7,000 bales of cotton, 4,000 bags of cotton seed, God knows how many packages of sundries, 300 cabin passengers and 500 deck passengers!

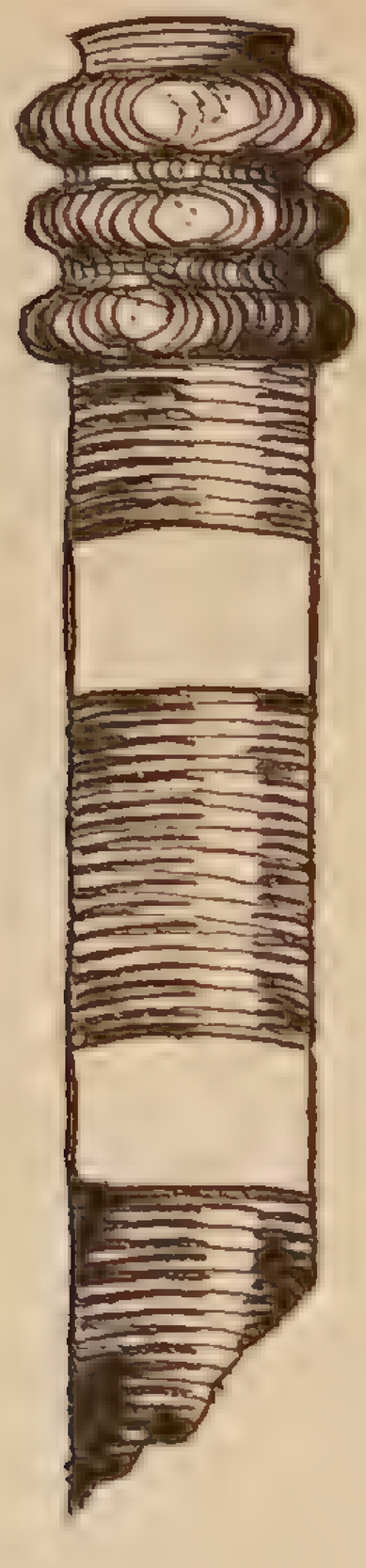
"And she wasn't the biggest cotton carrier on the river either. The *James Howard* in 1875 brought down to New Orleans 7,400 bales. Another time the *Grand Republic* brought down 8,200 bales besides her quota of passengers and general freight.

"But the biggest load of cotton ever carried by any boat was brought in by the *Henry Frank* from Memphis—9,226 bales! Besides that, I recall, she had on her decks about 1,200 packs of corn and a big load of sundries. Then, of course, there was a bunch of passengers—though not as many as at other times. That's not surprising, because cotton was piled along her decks and guards up level almost to the pilot house. Fact is, I believe all you could see above the cotton was her pilot house and smokestacks."

As this is being written, there comes word of renewed interest in racing steamboats on the Ohio. The *Cincinnati,* on which I had talked to Ankline Bob, as recorded above, has just beaten, in a race out of Louisville, the excursion packet *America.* Captain Roe, of the *Cincinnati* told me not long ago that he has plans for another boat to make trips, along with the *Cincinnati,* down to New Orleans for Mardi Gras each season. The *America,* beaten rival of the *Cincinnati,* was formerly a fast Louisville packet, built

by the famous Howard Shipyards at Jeffersonville for Commodore F. A. Laidley, president of a half dozen boat lines plying the rivers as late as 1900.

This race, the recent race of the stern wheelers *Chris Greene* and *Betsy Anne*, together with the enormous quotas of freight being handled each year by common carriers and privately owned boats on the rivers, speak for a revival of river traffic. But, there is every reason to believe, the old-time roustabout and the Coonjine have gone forever.



CHAPTER IX

PAYING TOLL TO THE OLD MOTHER

WHERE are they now? What became of them? Traverse the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans and you will not find a half-dozen of the old-time steamboats afloat to-day. And those half dozen will be of the small and unimpressive type. There are plenty of steamboats on the river to-day but they are modern steamboats—steel-hulled, some equipped with condensing machinery, some even with that (in the eyes of old river men) abomination—twin screw propellers; some—heaven help us—with Diesel engines!

Had all the old-time steamboats (by which I mean wooden steamboats built prior to, say, 1900) been strung out at equal intervals in a procession on the rivers from Pittsburgh to New Orleans, and then had you passed down the rivers in a motor boat to review that still pageant, you would never have been out of sight of a steamboat. And sometimes you would have been in sight of two or three at once.

In 1850 the number afloat was approximately eight hundred and fifty. Nine years later that number had increased to two thousand, which was the high point. Since then, one must depend rather upon estimates of river men, there being no authentic and

recognized compilation of all the Western River steamboats since. Numerous old river men have claimed to be in possession of the entire list of steamboats since the historic *Washington*, of Henry Shreve. Their lists differ. Who is to say which is correct?

Donald Wright, editor of the *Waterways Journal*, in St. Louis, who is about as good an authority on steamboat statistics as any man I know, places the number of steamboats built between 1859 and 1900 as two thousand.

Four thousand steamboats built, launched, used, in something more than three-quarters of a century. . . . And where are they now?

The last of the beautiful old Mississippi sidewheelers, the *Kate Adams*, rounded out a twenty-seven year life by taking an active part in the filming of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" within the last two years. Then, as though conscious of having done her utmost to perpetuate one living *moving* picture of a gallant steamboat in action (under the stage name of *La Belle Riviere*), the *Lovin' Kate* went quietly into shore and yielded herself to the flames which burned her to her hull. She had a steel hull, a grand insouciance of beauty, and the last of the ornate cabins.

Some day when you pass through Memphis on the train and pause just above the Grand Central Station of that city, look from your car window at the yellow Mississippi rolling past and see, close by a little wooded island in the stream, the bare, bleak hull of the once beautiful *Lovin' Kate*. Rumors are on foot,

however, that the Howards are to rebuild her on her old hull in a style befitting her former grandeur.

Other famous steamboats have gone in recent years.

In that severe winter of 1918 the Ohio froze over from bank to bank near its head. With the February thaw the ice came careening downstream in great floes, tearing loose from their moorings the various steamboats tied up for the winter, wrecking wharfboats, playing the devil generally. At Cincinnati the relentless ice caught up the fastest of the Ohio River packets, Commodore Laidley's *City of Louisville*, crushed in her sides and left her wallowing helplessly in the muddy waters, mortally wounded. Her sister boat, the *City of Cincinnati,* was flung high on the bank at the foot of Main Street—a cheerless, irretrievable wreck, her back broken.

But these are only a few instances of comparatively recent steamboat tragedies. To discover the real bulk of the toll which the rivers demanded of the steamboats one must go back to the earlier days when steamboat building was still in a comparatively experimental stage. In those times the steamboat disaster was not the exception, but the rule! A very few of them came to a peaceful end.

It was said in 1859 that when the Mississippi finally dries up the wrecks of two hundred steamboats will be found in that single two hundred miles between St. Louis and the mouth of the Ohio. Heaven knows how many have since been sunk in the same

area! And there are other places on the river as dangerous as that stretch.

The Old Mother holds her counsel. Down below her chocolaty, forbidding eddies lie the secrets of many a hundred steamboats, fair and frail and gallant, with their hidden tales of heroism, horror, rascality and wasted effort: gone, each to its death in her answerless deeps. For she always took her toll, whether the tragedy was one of bursting boilers, of simple conflagration, or of snagging. In the end, it was the Old Mother who spread out her tawny arms to receive to her bosom her just due of human life, of valuable property. Steamboats have sunk on their maiden trips or exploded lying peacefully at their berths. Sturdy, well-seasoned boats, proceeding along at a pleasant gait, doing a good business, with all apparently moving smoothly, have suddenly scattered in every direction when their boilers have let go. Then followed, inevitably, the gruesome reckoning of the casualties.

Henry Shreve's *Washington*, it will be recalled, set the fashion in 1817. Since that time, as one reads old accounts of tragedies on the rivers, it does seem as if the vast majority of her descendants have done their best to emulate her unfortunate example in that regard. For the entire somber record of Western River steamboating, for all its color, its beauty and its usefulness, was a constant moving panorama of catastrophe. It was not a pageant merely interspersed here and there with accidents. The accidents

came so thick and fast that, as you read the accounts of them, the very recital of harrowing details become monotonous.

It would be difficult to imagine anything more subject to fires than a steamboat built, in her upperworks, almost entirely of fine, painted woodwork, and loaded maybe with thousands of bales of cotton. Let someone—some roustabout possibly—fling a match carelessly to one side and set fire to a cotton bale. If that fire is not discovered and extinguished within a very few seconds, you might just as well bid goodbye to the boat. And frequently, to most of the passengers.

Many things have been held responsible for the ghastly number of steamboat explosions. The blame has been placed upon the commanders who would race their boats with all steam on, endangering vessel, passengers and freight for the empty honor of beating another boat up the river. But the number of accidents of that sort was comparatively rare. As Mark Twain took pains to explain, during races the engineer and pilot were more careful than at any other time: they spent their time watching every gauge cock and 'scape valve, were doubly careful in seeing that nothing was overlooked to keep their boat from moving swiftly and safely along. Mr. Twain said moreover that it was carelessness on the part of engineers during *regular* trips that was responsible for most of the explosions. A pilot *would* say that!

But, as you read farther and discover the similarity

in the appalling number of steamboat accidents, you are certain to make up your mind that the cause lies deeper than any carelessness on the part of any set of individuals. Possibly the blame may be laid at the feet of those who put faulty iron into steamboat boilers. For during the decade immediately following the Civil War the supply of good iron was scarce. The war had used it all. Now that steamboats are being built on steel hulls, under strict government supervision, we have difficulty in grasping the frequency and magnitude of such disasters of old times.

The worst marine disaster of modern times (up until the loss of the *Lusitania*) occurred on the Mississippi River just above Memphis on April 27, 1865. The steamboat *Sultana*, loaded down with two thousand two hundred discharged Federal soldiers on their way home after battle and imprisonment in the South, set out for the Ohio River cities. By a sad and singular coincidence, her rails and Texas were draped in heavy mourning; for only a few days previously she had been the first bearer of tidings from the North that Lincoln had been assassinated in Washington. If the officers of the boat, or Federal officers in charge of loading the troops, had been able to look ahead and see the horror that was to be the *Sultana's* within the next few days, they would have placed a double meaning on that sinister-looking bunting.

The *Sultana* was scheduled to carry fifteen hundred passengers (or passengers and freight equivalent to that weight). Instead, the Federal officers,

in their haste to get the soldiers north again, loaded on two thousand two hundred. Someone took a photograph of the *Sultana* just on the eve of her departure from Vicksburg, which shows her decks black with soldiers. They slept in every nook and cranny of the cabins and decks and many never awoke again. And through some unholy chance, there were a number of civilian passengers—several bridal couples!

It has been charged and with apparent justice that the *Sultana* had a hastily repaired, defective boiler before she departed from Vicksburg and that the Federal officers knew it, but were willing to take the chance.

Just above Memphis, near that island known as Paddies Hen and Chickens, in the dead of night, her whole battery of boilers exploded, flinging passengers here and there for a distance of several hundred yards. . . . For weeks afterwards the Mississippi below Memphis was strewn along its shore with stark, mangled bodies, lodged in the crotches of trees, caught horribly in the undergrowth of willows and cottonwoods. No one ever knew exactly how many people perished on the *Sultana*. Less than seven hundred were accounted for alive after the explosion. Many of those died of scalds and burns and shock. The bridal couples all perished.

The *Sultana* disaster is the high-water mark of all river horrors. And it differed in its attendant horrors in no essential from the hundreds of other steamboats, save in the number of the casualties involved.

To go farther back: Prior to the year 1849, 233 steamboats had been sunk, snagged, burned or exploded. Of that number of accidents 101 resulted from bursting boilers; 71 from collapsing flues. This total (remember it was 1849) represented a loss of life of 2563 and a loss in dollars of something over three millions.

Cholera was raging in St. Louis in 1849. Even the approach of cold weather in middle fall did not stay the ravages of the disease; and to cap the climax for a plague-ridden city, a terrific fire laid waste fifteen squares in the business section of St. Louis. The sparks carried on to some of the steamboats lying thickly against the levee soon produced a mile-long fire, glowing along the river bank. Inside of three hours twenty-four steamboats were burned.

Again and again did such riverside conflagrations carry off steamboats by the dozen.

Once more the water front at St. Louis saw a wholesale destruction of steamboats. The breaking up of a huge ice gorge in the winter of 1865-66 tore to pieces and totally disabled more than twenty steamboats, four wharfboats and a number of barges.

When Captain Cannon's *Louisiana* exploded as she lay quietly at the Gravier Street wharf, New Orleans, in 1849, she lay between the old *Bostona* and the *Storm*, each of which had her upper works torn completely away. An iron fragment blown up over the levee cut a mule clean in two, struck a horse and cart, instantly killing both animal and driver. Another

piece of "shrapnel" wrecked a coffee house at the corner of Canal and Front streets, passing through several cotton bales. The *Louisiana* sank within ten minutes after the explosion carrying down with her a great number of passengers and crew—as many almost as those whose now mutilated and mangled bodies lay blown about the levee. A shower of legs, arms and heads descended in a sickening rain upon the torn timber of the hulk as she settled into the river.

In that colorful year of 1860 on the rivers, two hundred and ninety-nine steamboat catastrophes marred a record otherwise splendid. Of these, one hundred and twenty were total losses.

Among the famous steamboats which met untimely ends, the magnificent *J. M. White* burned at Bayou Sara, Louisiana, in 1878.

The champion cotton carrier, *Henry Frank,* belonging to Captain Frank Hicks, of Memphis, burned in 1884 on an up-trip to Memphis, lightly loaded. She was built in 1878. She made her big trip, with nine thousand two hundred and twenty-six bales of cotton, a lot of other freight and some passengers, in April of 1881.

The huge *Grand Republic* went up in flames at the St. Louis wharf in 1877. Next to the *White,* she was the beauty of the rivers. Some claim she even outclassed the *White* in her ornamentation. She was three hundred and fifty feet long, her cabin was three hundred feet in length. Her cost was a quarter of a

million dollars. She was built in 1868 and named the *Great Republic*—a low pressure boat. Captain Thorwegan, of St. Louis, rebuilt her into the *Grand Republic*, put high pressure engines in her, and she made much money for him as a cotton carrier. She carried cargoes of four thousand tons.

She was chartered in 1873 to carry the visiting Grand Duke Alexis and his party from Columbus, Kentucky, to New Orleans. But the river froze over at Columbus and held the *Grand Republic* locked; so that the *James Howard* out of Memphis had to carry the Russian nobleman on to the Crescent City.

The famous pre-war racer, *Eclipse*—said to be the longest steamboat ever built—three hundred and sixty-five feet—came to a peaceful end. After a number of years of hard service, she was dismantled and her hull served as a wharfboat at Memphis until replaced by a larger one.

Probably the most unusual of all the steamboat disasters was that of the big sidewheeler *Mississippi*, in February, 1870. She sank while making a landing thirty miles above Natchez. And by some strange chance, her entire cabin parted from her hull, as the hull settled beneath the waters, and went floating downstream. Before daylight this cabin, her lights all still burning, many of her passengers still asleep in their berths but most on the hurricane roof, floated past Natchez, thirty miles from the point of the disaster! Ninety of the cabin-passengers were saved.

Some few became terrified as the cabin floated down, jumped, and were drowned.

Captain Sylvester Doss, a veteran pilot, to whose old records I am indebted for many points of information in this volume, wrote:

"I met the cabin of the *Mississippi* on the evening of February 29th at the mouth of Red River while on my way up at the wheel of the towboat, *Tom Rees, II*. After the passengers were rescued the cabin landed on the head of Tunica towhead."

Captain Doss doesn't say what became of that cabin, but I'd be willing to bet some enterprising river man salvaged her and put her on a new hull!

When the *James W. Goff* collided with the *Mountain Girl*, on November 6, 1885, near Rising Sun, Indiana, on the Ohio River, the *Goff's* stem clove through the *Mountain Girl's* larboard bow and sank her near the Indiana shore.

The *Mountain Girl* had a circus on board. The troupe suffered the loss of Comet, a blooded stallion, and a blooded mare called Silver, not to mention an enormous snake which went wriggling off through the water to be seen no more. "But," adds a contemporary account, "the beautiful Circassian girl of the circus was saved, though she lost every stitch of her wardrobe."

The winter of 1885 at St. Louis was a hard one for the steamboat interests, for the ice gorged just above the city. On the last day of January, with the

thermometer rising to sixty degrees, the whole sullen grinding mass let go and came downstream past the wharf where numerous fine steamboats were tied up. The big old *Will S. Hays*, a magnificent New Orleans sidewheeler, sank, as did a ferryboat or two and some barges of the Mississippi Valley Transportation Company. And a series of peculiar accidents happened to the finer boats of the Anchor Line which serve to illustrate the flexibility of the Western River steamboat hull:

The *City of Baton Rouge* (Horace Bixby one-time captain) was pushed stern first three feet out on the bank. The *City of Vicksburg* was slightly damaged. The *City of St. Louis* landed sixteen inches out on the bank; her casualties were slight also. Her hull received a slight twist. The *Belle of Memphis* received somewhat worse damages. The famous flexibility of hull, that is the peculiarity of the steamboat, enabled those Anchor Line boats to be repaired and set to work again. A boat with a rigid hull would have snapped to pieces.

Down in my country one time there was a long old sternwheeler named *Virginia*, which high water from the Kanawha had left stranded up in a field a hundred yards back from the river, high and dry. The owner got tired waiting for another flood, and after three months set to work, dug a little canal, floated the old boat down to the Howards' repair yards. And in a few weeks she was going about her business as though nothing had happened! Under another name

she is still in operation as an excursion boat at New Orleans.

Other Anchor Liners went as the century drew to a close. The *City of Helena* burned at Memphis in March, 1885. The *City of Natchez* burned below Cairo in 1886. The *City of Hickman* sank above Memphis in 1896. The *City of Paducah* sank in 1891 near the Illinois shore not far from St. Louis. At Cairo, also, in 1898 the *City of Osceola* burned. Right there within the space of about one decade more than a million dollars in fine steamboat property went by the board.

The machinery of another of the Anchor Liners, *City of Providence*, when that boat sank, went into the long, slim *City of Cincinnati*, built by Commodore Laidley in the late 'Nineties. She went to pieces in the ice gorge at Cincinnati in 1918, as already mentioned.

The gallant old racer, *Robert E. Lee*, lived out her life usefully to a ripe old age. She was built in 1866, entered the cotton trade in the fall of that year, and ran successfully and profitably for a decade, at first under the immediate command of Captain Cannon and later under Captain William Campbell, detailed by Cannon to command her. Her largest load of cotton was 5,741 bales in 1874. In one season she carried 104,051 bales, besides such additional items as 83,000 sacks of cottonseed. She made money for Cannon, and in 1879 he removed her machinery and sold the hull and cabin to the Little Rock, Mississippi

and Texas railroad to be used as a wharfboat on the Arkansas River where the railroad and boats connected. An ignominious descent for so proud a vessel! I think she must have felt it deeply, seeing that her insides had been removed and placed in the second *Robert E. Lee*. And therefore I like to believe it was not unwelcome to her that a fire destroyed the hull entirely a few months later.

A striking parallel to the *Lee's* fate may be found in that of her ancient rival, the racer *Natchez*. For ten years after the famous race of 1870 the old *Natchez* made money for her owner, Captain Leathers, and then became a storage plant for the Refuge Oil Company of Vicksburg. Yet she held on, doing her duty until 1899, when the flames devoured her.



PART SIX

STEAMBOATING TODAY

CHAPTER I

TOWING ON THE WESTERN RIVERS

ONCE not long ago I came down the river from St. Louis to New Orleans on the *Baton Rouge*, a large new-type towboat belonging to the Federal Barge Line. And in the pilot house, hour after hour, in broad sunlight, driving rain, blanketing mist and mantling night, I watched Captain Elmer Owery, a portly and experienced Mississippi pilot, casually take the equivalent of about four hundred carloads of freight in barges over that twelve hundred miles of treacherous river; and that was a comparatively small tow. He accomplished this (which, in his estimation, was just another six days' work) with a twin-propeller towboat; and one of those propellers was broken, useless. So, when I say the *Baton Rouge* and her convoy of barges came "limping into port" at Algiers just opposite Canal Street, you may be certain that I talk no mere trite journalese.

Piloting on the Mississippi has been so much written and over-written that one is hard put to it to know where truth leaves off and fiction begins. Primarily, Mark Twain was a fiction writer. Could he or the renowned Horace Bixby, or George Ealer, or Beck Jolly—any of the immortal river pilots—come back to life and mount to the pilot house of a

modern towboat and look ahead at the long string of barges to be pushed down the river or up the river, he would come immediately to the conclusion that piloting a big river packet of the palmy steamboat days wasn't one, two, three, to piloting tows of freight, such as have been moving on the river since his heyday.

Because, while the difficulties of navigating the rivers have been markedly reduced these last forty years (by the installation of government lights which burn with the fixed regularity of North stars to aid pilots from one end of the lower river to the other, and while the channels have been improved by the addition of locks and dams and a vigilant corps of government engineers) other difficulties for the pilot have been commensurately increased. Aforetimes, your Western River pilot had to take a single steamboat up and down the rivers, through an unlighted, cluttered channel. Nowadays his job is to negotiate the same channel, improved and lighted, but with a ten-times larger cargo on his hands: A steamboat and a fleet of barges—the whole business sticking out in front of him.

What is known as *towing* on the Western Rivers is a combination of flatboating and steamboating. Like steamboating it is unique, peculiar to the needs of the section. Just when it began no one can definitely say. Very probably in the 'Twenties, when some keen-sighted flatboatmen, having brought their goods to New Orleans to market and not wishing to sell their

flatboats and return home on foot, paid a fair price to one of the existing little steamboats to push them back to the Ohio. Later they found it quicker to be towed downstream as well.

And yet the term "towing," as here used, is and always has been a misnomer. The dictionaries have it that towing means "to pull; to draw; to haul; especially to drag through the water by means of a rope or chain." And that is the way it is done in the East. Stand any day on the Battery in lower New York City, on the shores of Chesapeake Bay, or anywhere else along the Atlantic seaboard where there is marine freight activity in operation, and you will see the powerful deep-draft important-looking little tugboats plodding by, drawing a long string of barges behind—sometimes a half mile behind.

That is towing in sober truth.

But try such tactics on the Western Rivers; try to *drag* a half dozen barges of coal or any other commodity behind a sternwheel, steamboat or a modern propeller boat and find the difficulty which you will encounter. With the innumerable curves and channel irregularities in the Mississippi and its tributaries, *towing* barges at the tail of a steamboat (*à la* deep-water) would be like trying to follow the curves of a corkscrew with an ice pick; it couldn't be done. Rounding a sudden curve with his barges following in the rear at the end of a sufficiently long tow-line, the pilot in his glass-enclosed residence atop the hurricane deck of the towboat would look back to find

that the line had stretched across some intervening point of land, ripping down the trees and barns or snapping, with a gunshot report, to send his entire tow floating away to be recaptured and rounded up only at a great loss of time and money. And, besides, how in the name of all that's difficult could any human pilot *drag* a long-strung-out tow of barges through that tortuous *ditch within a ditch* which is the actual, but ever-changing, channel of the rivers?

And so, very early in the steamboat game, pilots and captains discovered that to meet these hard conditions of convoying barge loads of freight, it would be necessary to lash the tow into one solid whole; barges and towboat to move in a single unit. Still further, in order to keep the tow continually in sight, and to be able to swing it about properly to meet the vagaries of the current, the logical place for that tow was discovered to be right in front of the towboat!

In other words, *towing* on the river is really *pushing*.

Very likely the steamboatmen gained this information over a period of some years' actual experience. In and around New Orleans, as early as 1820, according to Captain Martin C. Doss who kept a log book of those times, there were some towboats engaged in miscellaneous towing: the *Baltic* (*not* the great racer of the same name) and one of the earlier *Telegraphs*, while from New York a number of deep-water tugboats were brought around the horn of

Florida and into New Orleans harbor. Among these were the *Hercules*, *Hudson* and *Post Boy*.

Old Martin Doss, himself,—who with his son, Sylvester, afterwards became well-known steamboatmen on the Big River—went from Pittsburgh to New York and brought the *Post Boy* around in 1825. On finding that she was equipped with the hated low-pressure engines, he immediately had them replaced with high-pressure machinery. Then she proceeded on up the river to Cincinnati and with a tow of several barges started down again, laying up for some slight repairs at Louisville. While there, the clerk, Frank Powers, put his hand in the money drawer and ran off with all the ready cash—some fifteen thousand dollars. Word was got to the owner, James McNeill, back in New York, and he immediately came overland on horseback bringing with him a pocketful of change to pay all the boat's debts!

Whereupon the *Post Boy* resumed her leisurely trip southward. That was in 1825 and a few weeks more or less delay was nothing to worry about. Between 1839 and 1840 a dozen other towboats plied in the Lower River trade—for the most part sidewheelers—with animal names: the *Shark*, the *Lion*, the *Swan*, the *Porpoise*, the *Tiger*, the *Grampus*. And there were the *Phœnix*, the *Pilot*, the *Pacific*, and *Mohican*.

But that towing was for miscellaneous freight and the boats engaged in it were pretty slow movers. The bulk of the freight continued to move by the big packets which were more dependable. Not until

February, 1854, was the first commercial tow of coal brought down to New Orleans, by *The Crescent City*. She brought sixty-four thousand bushels in three barges consigned to C. A. Miltonberger—a name still prominent in New Orleans and pronounced "Mil-tong-bair-jay′," the family having come from Alsace-Lorraine.

Most adequately has Charles Edward Russell in his "A-Rafting on the Mississippi," a recent excellent book, covered that swash-buckling period of American transportation on the Upper Mississippi, when log rafts from the great Northwest were pushed down to St. Louis to market. The lumber rafts, covering sometimes an acre or so each, would be convoyed by "raft boats" which differed only slightly from the regular towboats on the Lower River and the Ohio and its tributaries, used to bring down coal.

No one has written a saga of the Great Black Fleet: the moving as of huge river caravans of ponderous barges of coal from Pennsylvania and Kanawha and Western Kentucky coal fields to the South. Yet it has been, and still is to a certain degree, a majestic and impressive thing. I have seen towboats gathered by the dozen in the Great Kanawha's mouth, each with its quota of barges—whether six or a dozen or more—waiting for water deep enough to move on in a stately procession to their destined goal.

Up in our part of the country—the Kanawha coal

fields—mining is done by the drift method—that is, by a shaft run horizontally into the coal seam from its outcropping at a certain point on the hillside. Sometimes the main entrance to the mine is high up the hill so that tramcars—working on the Brer-Rabbit-well system, whereby one car going down loaded pulls the empty car up to the mine again—may run smoothly down into a huge skeleton structure known as a tipple which overhangs the storage bins, and dump their loads of bituminous.

The coal barges are pushed into the bank and loaded from this bin. A coal barge holds one thousand tons; a coal boat, which is shaped a little differently, holds a little more. As these barges are filled, the towboat shifts them about from place to place in the vicinity and when the tale of barges is complete, the towboat's crew gathers them into a huge pieced-together raft, about three barges long and four barges wide. That would be a fair sized tow for our section of the country.

Out on the front of these barges gleams at night the red and green lanterns of warning. One may stand on the river bank and see, sliding past him, these two lanterns and not be aware that a towboat is far in the rear pushing the barges along.

At a signal from the pilot house—the tapping of the bell—the lead-heavers walk out along the gunwales, one on either extreme edge of the barges, and cast the lines to determine the depth of the river.

This information, called back (sometimes in windy weather and on a big tow it has to be relayed for the matter of a hundred yards) to the lonely man in the pilot house, informs him how and whether to proceed.

I have stood in the pilot house of the old *D. T. Lane* and talked casually with Captain Bill Patrick while he rounded out a mighty convoy of barges from the rain-swollen Kanawha into the Ohio and the current of the mightier stream caught up the elephantine mass to bear it headlong against the nether bank—had not that skillful handling of the wheel brought us out into the sure smooth swift current of the Ohio, with the *Lane's* sternwheel threshing the waters to *hold the great mass back*, her rudder causing that mighty floating island lashed out in front of us to respond as though it were a very part of the boat itself.

Meanwhile, from the forward ends of the first barges the calls of the leadsmen came, musical, careless and unconcerned:





Quart- ah less Two-a-in!



no bot--tom!

Historic tows of coal have descended the rivers at a clip.

A tow made up of about eighteen coal barges and coal boats, with two smaller coal boats lashed at the immediate side of the towboat itself to supply the fuel for the steamboat, would measure three hundred and fifty feet in length and one hundred and fifty feet in width, cover an area of one and a quarter acres and represent the output of six to seven acres of coal land. Twenty-four thousand tons of coal is carried in such a tow; and every day during the shipping season from Pittsburgh coal district—ten of those

tows would roll out of the harbor and surge southward.

Piloting, say you? Mark Twain's may be called difficult, but it was more or less in the manner of child's play compared to handling tows of coal. One learns to steer and control a single boat and then graduates from that into the higher towboat pilotry! Nowhere is such skill, judgment and nerve called into play as in the handling of big tows.

The *Joseph B. Williams*, a whopper of a towboat, brought down from Pittsburgh to New Orleans sometime in the late 'Eighties a tow of thirty-two barges containing 600,000 bushels of coal. This was exclusive of her own fuel and to that time it was the largest coal shipment ever made anywhere in the world. The freight bill, at three cents a bushel, for that tow of coal amounted to $18,000. It would have required 1,800 railroad cars (of that period) to transport the shipment. At $10.00 per ton or $100 per car (which would have been a fair railroad price at the time) the price of shipping would have been $180,000. In less than sixteen days the shipment reached New Orleans.

But this tow, large as it was, paled into insignificance when placed alongside the performance of a later towboat (the largest ever on the river and still in service on the lower Mississippi) the *Sprague*. Her record tow—1909—was 54,000 tons, or fifty-six coal barges! Now if you are good at comparisons,

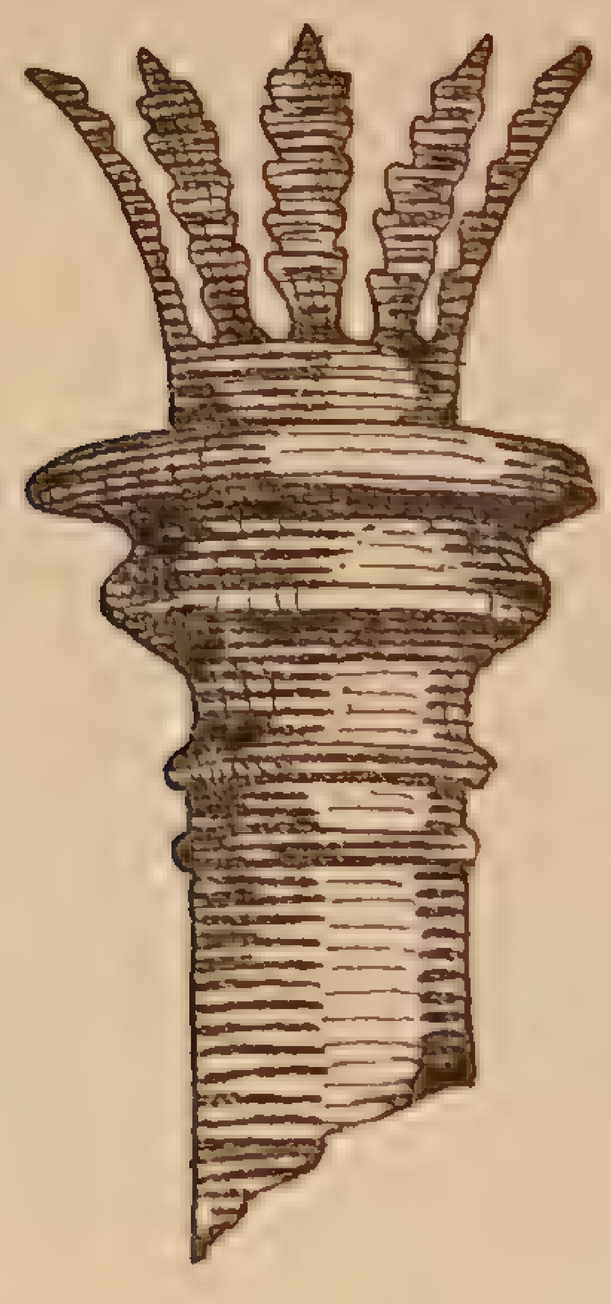
figure that out in terms of railroad cars and see how long your train would be!

To see such a tow swinging down the river through narrow channels, around sharp bends, between the stone piers of bridges where a single mis-turn of the wheel, a failure of judgment, a miscalculation, would spell disaster or wreck; the pilot guiding the entire mass from his pilot house away back there on the boat in the rear; now backing, now flanking, now pushing; one can't but think of the saying about the tail wagging the dog! so strange and impossible does the control from the towboat at the rear seem to the beholder. Yet it is being done all the time—though, possibly, not in such large bulk since the discovery and mining of coal in Alabama has curtailed the need of such great quantities of the commodity in the far South.

The towboat pilot is the man in demand these days on the river, and if he is a towboat pilot he can pilot any craft that floats. Such a man is Captain Elmer Owery at the wheel of the *Baton Rouge,* of the Federal Barge Line Fleet on her weekly trips, and such are the other men who are piloting the boats of the growing new merchant marine on the Western Rivers to-day. For there are more new steamboats and barges on the river to-day than there have been in twenty-five years. The beginning of the Great War found steamboating at a pretty low stage. Some people thought it was dead, gone, a passed issue in

American activities, having taken its place along with the other relics that we love to classify as Americana.

But not everyone thought that. Certain wise old river men, as well as certain younger but hard-headed practical business men scattered over the country, but mainly in the Mississippi Valley, retained in their minds an insuperable fact: that the rivers to-day are as good mediums for transporting freight at a rate that undercuts railroad rates as they were fifty years ago.



CHAPTER II

PUTTING OLD MOTHER TO WORK AGAIN

IN late May, 1918, a group of business men representing most of the important industries of the Midwest and South waited on William G. McAdoo, director general of the American railroads for the period of the war. They came to urge upon him that certain recommendations of a committee he had recently appointed be adopted immediately and the work necessary to their execution be got under way.

The second year of the war was under way. The railroads (sadly the worse for wear in the hands of the government) were overworked beyond all reason. Something had to be done to carry the increasing piles of bulk freight from place to place, to provide added mediums of transportation. And for that reason the director general had appointed his committee on waterways to determine just how the neglected Western Rivers could be made to bear again upon their breasts the commercial fleets that once they had borne—or ever the railroads had driven the remnants of steamboating away from their channels.

This committee, after as exhaustive a study of the situation as the exigencies of the times would permit, had advised the establishment of a barge fleet to

operate as a common carrier on the lower Mississippi —from St. Louis to New Orleans—to cost $8,200,000. For the Black River, the Warrior and the Tombigbee Rivers in Alabama, the same committee had advised the expenditure of some $3,000,000 to provide for a somewhat similar barge service between the coal and iron districts of Birmingham and the port of New Orleans.

The move was a war-time expedient on the part of the government. The bulk of the people, as well, apparently considered it as nothing else. The use of the rivers, these last twenty years, had been reduced to a few local packets of a small and inconsequential sort, and to a few tows of coal from Pittsburgh and Kanawha coal fields. In the public mind as a whole the rivers were a back number. Steamboating was dead. The railroads supplied all the transportation that was needed.

Yet those hard-headed business men of the Middle West who came to see Director General McAdoo that day in May, 1918, entertained no idea that the establishment of the barge line, backed by government capital to stimulate a renewed interest in the rivers in which we as a nation had lost faith, was to be a temporary activity.

Not if they could help it! This barge line was to be merely a starter. They were looking ahead for the permanent re-establishment of legitimate freight traffic upon the rivers for the very good and sufficient reason that, after the war should have been won, they

would have secured to themselves a means of transporting their bulk goods at a cost cheaper than the railroads charged.

It was a repetition of the old story—the old story of the people along the Western Rivers once more demanding the opening of the streams to the actuality of trade. And again the "Westerners" had their way.

In June the advices of the committee on Inland Waterways was heeded.

In July the Mississippi-Warrior Service—sometimes known as the Federal Barge Line—was born, a left-handed but promising child of the War Department. M. J. Sanders, appointed the first Federal Manager, corralled all the available existing equipment which could serve his purpose and put it in service; proceeding meanwhile to construct the new fleet authorized by the director general.

The "available equipment" referred to consisted of twenty steel flat-deck barges belonging to the United States Engineers, carrying about four hundred and fifty tons each, and a part of the fleet of the Kansas City-Missouri River Transportation Company. This latter section of the equipment included two one thousand-ton barges, three six-hundred-ton barges, and two small towboats. Two other towboats in the service of the United States Engineers were loaned; another was leased.

With this small fleet—a rather sorry beginning—the line commenced operation in September, 1918. And well the experiment proved its worth as an aid

in carrying freight during the war. So well, in fact, that—still under the urgings of the people along the Western Rivers—Congress decided it was too good a thing to give up and decided to continue to furnish money for its operation in peace times; the purpose being to stimulate the establishment of privately-owned lines of common carriers. When the Federal Barge Line had put itself upon a paying basis, the government was to turn it over to private interests and go on about its business.

And immediately from the railroads of the United States went up a howl of protest.

"Why should the government go into business?" they demanded. "Why should the government assist the river people? It is unfair to us! We are hard enough put to it with the Interstate Commerce Commission as it is!"

"Rats!" retorted the steamboat people. "We are just coming in for our share. Back there when you railroad fellows were extending your steel lines out to get the business from the river territory which our steamboats had built up and fostered, you established a lot of ruinous rate slashings which played the devil with our steamboat business. You weren't satisfied with getting the passenger business and the quick-moving and perishable freight. You drove practically all the steamboats off the river by reducing your rates at points where your lines touched any navigable stream and maintained them at points where you had no river competition. You put your rates so low that

they even undercut the steamboats'. After you had accomplished your sinister purpose, you raised your rates higher than ever. Then when you saw that that didn't quite do the work, you railroad men (those of you whose lines parallel the rivers) went into the steamboat business, bought up all the steamboats you could and commenced to run them at lower rates in competition with the regular boats. That did the work. You came pretty near killing steamboating—passenger and freight."

The debate thus begun continues somewhat as follows:

"Forget it!" comes back the railroads' reply. "Whatever may have been the sins of the railroads in the past, you've got to admit that they are purged now and adequately able to take care of the nation's need at the present."

To which the river advocates answer: "For the present, perhaps, but what about the future? The country's population is increasing at so great a rate that the railroads will not be able to care for all the traffic before long—nor the highways either. There are no new railroads being built nowadays. Inland waterways will help take care of the growing transportation needs."

"Maybe so," respond the railroaders. "But the government is backing your old rivers financially with money from the treasury paid by tax-payers, many of whom will get no benefit from it. We railroads have to help pay those taxes to aid you to take

away business from us! And that is not fair to us!"

"No? Government assistance, did you say? Do you mean to say you don't take into consideration all those millions of acres of lands, belonging to the people, that Congress and presidents handed out to you when you built your lines during the years between 1860 and 1910? If that wasn't aid from the government, what was it? You've made many a hundred millions off that land since then."

But the railroad fellows are positive. "There is no parallel between the two. The government gave us a lot of worthless land that would have been worthless yet if our railroad lines hadn't come along and made it valuable."

"Yes, but you railroads sold that land and made yourself a royal subsidy from the government."

The railroads take another dig. "But the Barge Line bookkeeping is all wrong. Your books show a profit and you haul a lot of freight that we hauled beforetimes. But if the government had not furnished your capital, where would you be? You make no allowance whatever for interest on the original investment of $5,000,000 the government first gave you from the treasury to incorporate the Inland Waterways Corporation back there in 1924. And what about this additional $10,000,000 they just gave you under the provision of the Denison Bill? Without such capital stock, do you think the Federal Barge Line could have shown a profit? Not by a damn sight!"

"The purpose of the Federal Barge Line," the river advocates explain patiently, "is merely to stimulate interest in the river business, to prove to private capital that waterway transportation in the Mississippi Valley, which you nearly killed, will pay. And it is doing that, too."

"Well, then, why doesn't Congress turn over the Barge Line to private capital, as was originally stated?" growl the railroads.

"Be patient, that's coming all right," snap back the river people.

And so the exchange of compliments goes on from week to week between the publications devoted to railroad transportation and those devoted to river transportation. Never a railroad president or other railroad official addresses a college graduating class, a Rotary meeting, a traffic club gathering, a chamber of commerce convention—a group of any sort, in fact—but that he drags in edgeways a little sort of left-handed compliment to the waterways—if you gather what I mean—which is that he simply says that waterways are all wrong. And never a waterways advocate (including one Herbert Hoover, among others) has an opportunity but that he envisions huge waterways projects running east and west, north and south: the Ohio River system and the New York State Barge Canal, on the one hand; the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Lakes-to-the-Gulf Waterway, on the other—the whole bearing once more a mighty mer-

chant marine which will play its part in caring for the transportation needs of a growing nation.

There was once a roustabout who worked on the big sidewheeler *Ed Richardson* out of New Orleans, who claimed he was the best rouster on the Lower River. Best, in many ways. Not only could he spin a barrel of sugar with a careless ease along the stage-plank and on to the forecastle of the boat. Not only could he roll the cotton bales over and over with an effortless grace. Not only was he the prime rouster among de gals at all de towns along de rivers. He claimed, and many times had demonstrated his ability to back up the claim, that he could lick any other rouster from Cairo to the Passes. He stood about six feet two and weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. His name was Vicksburg Ned.

One day while Ned was boasting his claims in the shade of a freight shed on the levee at New Orleans, a strange negro walked out from behind the pile of freight where he had been dozing and over to the talker. The newcomer was a little taller and considerably broader than Ned. But he wasn't talking much. He merely walked up to rouster No. 1 and pushed out his undershot jaw in front of him, demanding:

"Huh? How's dat?"

Vicksburg Ned surveyed the newcomer carefully, doing meanwhile a lot of thinking, taking in every inch of the huge frame, the taut muscles, that protruding jaw and business-like fist. Then he said:

"Now I ain't got no fight wid you. I didn't start dis yer argymint to wuk up ruckus wid you, big boy. I jes statin' de pints dat intrus me, 'do dey might not intrus you. Nawsuh, I ain't gwine enter into no argymint wid you!"

Whenever, in the course of my work, I run up against a problem which is a little larger than I can tackle, I feel rather like Vicksburg Ned. I might as well say in this case, "I ain't writin' dis here book ter git in no quoil wid nobody." Whether the railroads are right or whether the river interests are right in the matter of the Federal Barge Line, I do not undertake to say. Donald Wright, editor of the *Waterways Journal*, who for many years has been hammering into the minds of Americans the fact that river traffic is not dead, but only sleeping; Theodore Brent, a profound student of transportation and a recognized authority on the subject, now president of a coastwise steamship company; William R. Dawes, president of the Mississippi Valley Association—to name only three—are pretty good fighters on the side of the waterways. While for the railroads, expert publications, such as the *Traffic World* and the *Railway Age*, and the president of every railroad even down to the least of the jerkwater streaks of rust, are ever ready to show by intricate figures that the waterways can never operate on a practical basis.

If I were to take anybody's side in this squabble, it would be neither the Federal Barge Line officials' nor

the railroads'. It would be the part of the people of the Middle West—the people who live along the shores of the great, beneficent Western Rivers and who are profiting by the Barge Line's lower rates. These mid-Westerners are turning again instinctively to those rivers as free highways on which to move goods to and from market. And, if by the use of all-water routes or rail-and-water routes, the Mississippi Valley people can bring about a savings of twenty per cent, or fifteen per cent, or ten per cent, I see no reason why the rivers should not be put to work for that purpose.

And, in this connection, the question naturally arises: Suppose the Federal Barge Line were turned over to private operation, suppose other carriers—common and contract carriers—operated successfully on the rivers, would the railroads still have their complaints? Is the real cause of the railroads' excitement *not* that the government should operate barges and towboats, but that towboats and barges—operated by anybody at all—should prove successful in recapturing a part of the business which the railroads got from the rivers a few decades ago?

These are questions, as I have indicated above, which are not in the province of a mere lover of steamboatin' to answer. Still they are questions.

. . . . . .

Which brings us, with something of a jolt, to the present. What of steamboating to-day? Just what is taking place on the rivers? Are there any regular

lines of steamboats running at all now, either for freight or passengers or both?

The answer to these questions is that there is an intense activity on the rivers to-day, that there are lines of steamboats, both passenger and freight, operating. But the activity appears intense only when it is compared with the almost-dead condition of steamboating in the near past—say between 1912 and 1920. When you compare the present-day status of steamboating with the great days of forty years ago, or more, a casual observer would say that steamboating is still rather dead.

But the outlook is brighter now than it has been in many a long day.

On the Mississippi—the lower river, besides the Federal Barge Line, the American Barge Line operates as a common carrier between Pittsburgh and New Orleans. Its offices are in Louisville and it maintains regular and frequent sailings and does a paying business.

On the Mississippi—the Upper River, in addition to the Federal Barge Line which now operates as far north as Minneapolis from St. Louis, the Eagle Packet Company—an old and honorable line of upper Mississippi steamboats—plies into the Illinois River as far as Peoria: the same route to be followed by the boats and barges of the new Lake-to-the-Gulf Waterways now nearing completion. The Streckfus Line operates north out of St. Louis also.

On the Ohio, the old Louisville and Cincinnati

Packet Company operates its daily boats between those two cities where in old times the *General Pikes*, the *Ben Franklins*, the *Alvin Adams*, the *Jacob Strader*, and the famous *City of Louisville*, once plied. And I have yet to hear that the line is losing money.

From Cincinnati northward to Pittsburgh and into the Kanawha River as far east as Charleston, West Virginia, run the daily steamboats of the Greene Line. Captain Gordon Greene, the founder of this line, a veteran steamboatman who thirty years ago operated a number of good-sized packets he had built himself or bought from Commodore Laidley, has passed to his reward. His two sons and his widow, the plump, pleasant and capable Captain Mary Greene, carry on the business. Captain Mary's title is not one of mere courtesy. She has her license all right and is said to be the only woman steamboat captain on the Ohio River system.

Captain Frederick Way, Jr., of Pittsburgh, runs two weekly boats between that city and Cincinnati, as general packets.

Two large contract carrier lines, the Union Barge Line, out of Pittsburgh, and the Barrett Line out of Cincinnati, do a good business all the year round.

In addition to these regular lines, are numerous individually owned steamboats operating on the tributaries of the Lower Mississippi (such as Captain Cooley's *Ouachita*), and on the tributaries of the Ohio.

This year 1929 looks doubly bright for the steam-

boatmen on the Ohio since it is to mark the completion of a long-under-way series of locks and dams from the head to the mouth of the Ohio. The canalized river, which will now provide ample channel all the year round, means the removal of one more obstacle to the reestablishment of a real steam transportation on the river.

Numerous coal, oil and steel companies maintain their own fleets of powerful towboats and barges on the Mississippi and the Ohio. Notable among these are the Standard Oil Company, the Jones-Laughlin Steel Company, the Pittsburgh Steel Company, the Wheeling Steel Company, and the West Kentucky Coal Company. And from the mines in the Kanawha Valley tows of coal still move out to Louisville and Cincinnati.

And yet—the tragedy of it!—there is not a single passenger packet line between New Orleans and the North. A traveler to-day cannot get passage, even by a series of changes, from New Orleans up the river to Louisville, or even to Cairo or Memphis. Where once one had his choice of a score of fine steamboats daily, each assuring one of the best that could be offered passengers, there is not one packet to convey one between those two great cities which the steamboats made—New Orleans and St. Louis. The one exception is that once a year, in deference to the ancient and sensible custom that the correct way to attend the carnival of Mardi Gras is by steamboat, the big *Cincinnati,* from the Ohio River, the *Cape*

Girardeau, from St. Louis, together with a number of smaller steamboats, sidle as of old up to the wharf at the foot of Canal Street, while the crowds on deck wave to the crowds on shore and the negroes make fast the lines.

There seems to be no doubt in the minds of the most confirmed river advocates that steamboating, as it was known in the golden days, is gone as surely as the stage-coach. And, save in the case of a number of reminiscent old river men who like to gather and lament the passing of old times, they accept the fact as the natural result of a half-century's progress. The railroads could do it better than the steamboats, and faster. And so the railroads got the passenger business from the steamboats. The grand packets passed away; and passed also the grand manner, the gesture, the flourish, the impressive dignity that sat so splendidly upon steamboating of other days. To-day, steamboating—and there is still plenty of it in progress on the rivers—is a more or less commonplace thing (if steamboating can ever be called commonplace) of regular schedules, comparatively few hazards, steel hulls and modern business methods. Utilitarianism, in place of ornamentation, is the keynote of steamboat construction. Even on the few passenger steamboats that remain a noticeable restraint in decoration and upholstery is manifest.

There are certain thoughtful engineers at the shipyards and elsewhere who are ready to predict the coming of fast passenger sidewheel packets, oil

burners or Diesel engine, to make thirty to thirty-five miles an hour: steamboats equipped with every convenience that a modern hotel can supply, from private shower bath to valet service and twin beds—tourists' boats that would be designed to carry exploring Americans on any part of that fifteen thousand miles of Mississippi system. (And any Upper Mississippi River man is ready to swear that the scenery of his region would stack up well against anything that the Rhine has to offer.)

But even should a dozen, a score, a hundred fine passenger packets put in an appearance on the rivers; even though the barge fleets multiply until they move a highly profitable bulk of freight annually, the pageant of American steamboating has passed.

And with it passed the most fascinating, the most colorful, and the most romantic period in the history of American transportation.



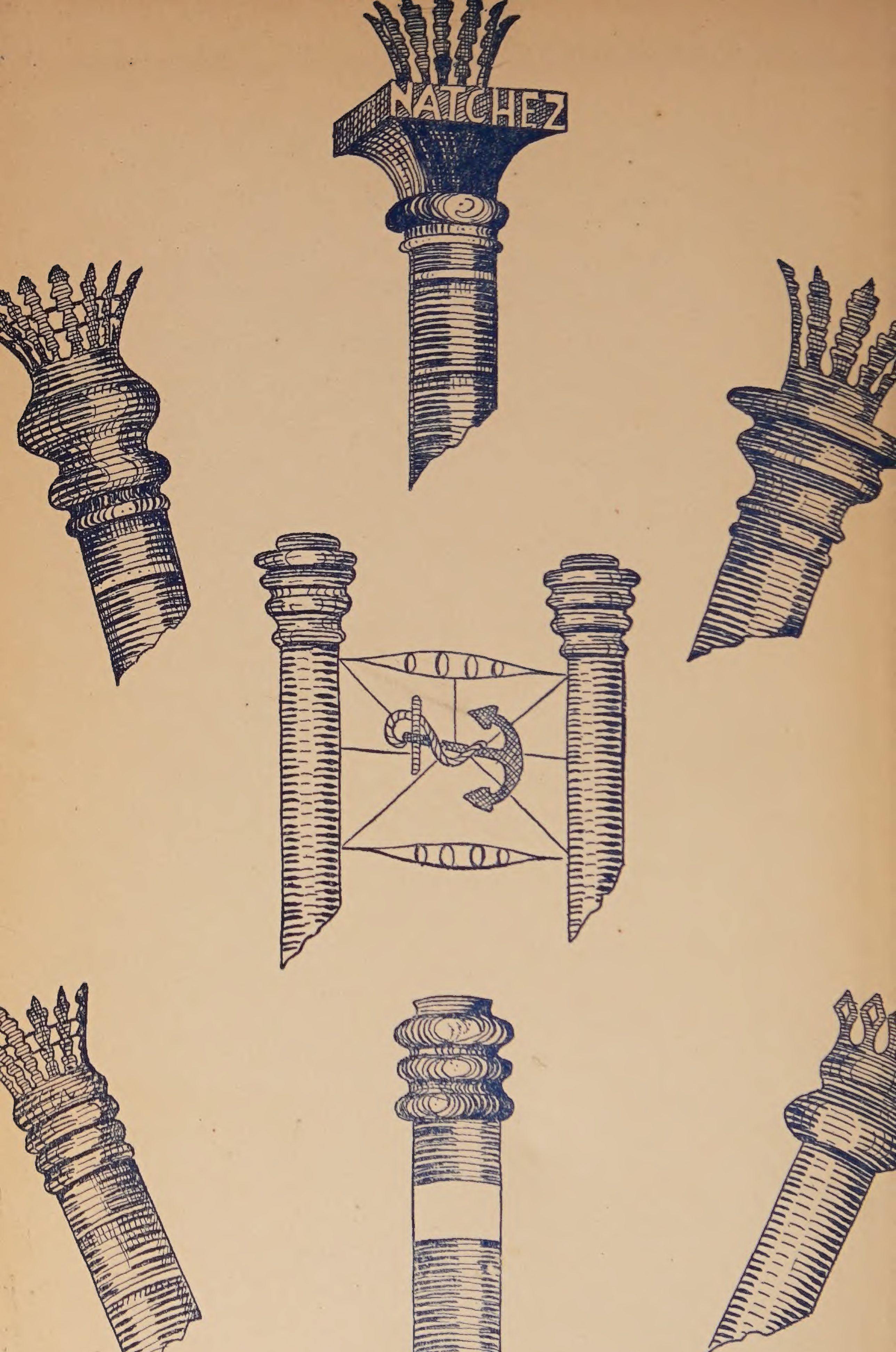
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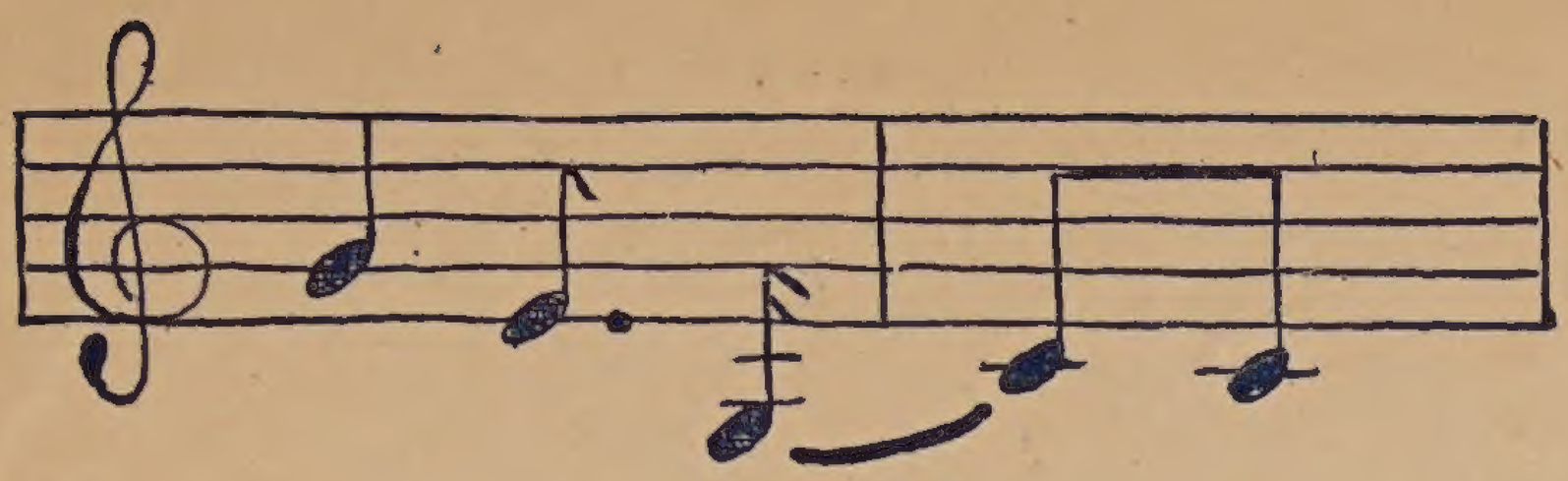
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Back Files—*New Orleans Item.*
Back Files—*Century Magazine.*
Back Files—*Harper's Weekly.*
"A-Rafting on the Mississippi," Charles Edward Russell.
"Father Mississippi," Lyle Saxon.

But chiefly, seeking information about steamboating, I have gone to the real sources of such material: the unclouded memories of old steamboat owners, builders, captains, pilots, mates, engineers—and roustabouts.

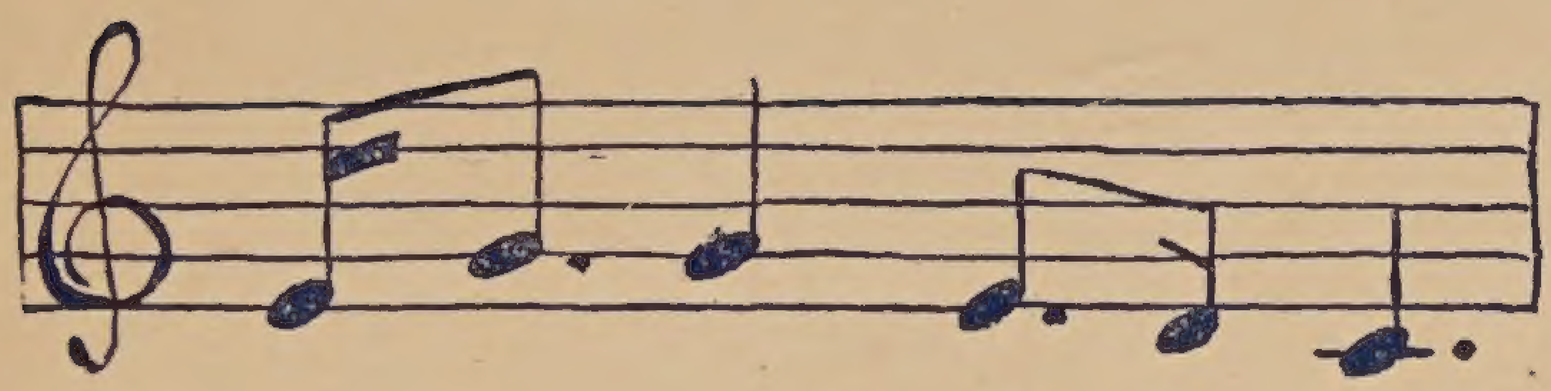
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burg, Mississippi; LeRoy Cook, of Chicago; Miss Aline Stottlebower, of Madison, Indiana; Mr. James E. Howard, President, The Howard Shipyards and Dock Company, Jeffersonville, Indiana; Captain William Duke, Engineer Charles Smith and Pilot William Neihysel, all of New Orleans.

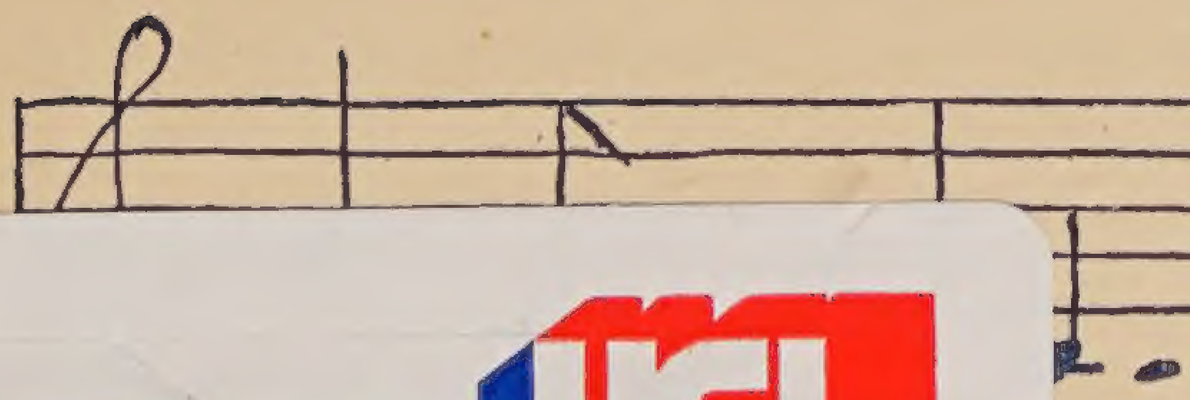

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Quart-ah less Twa-a-in!



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